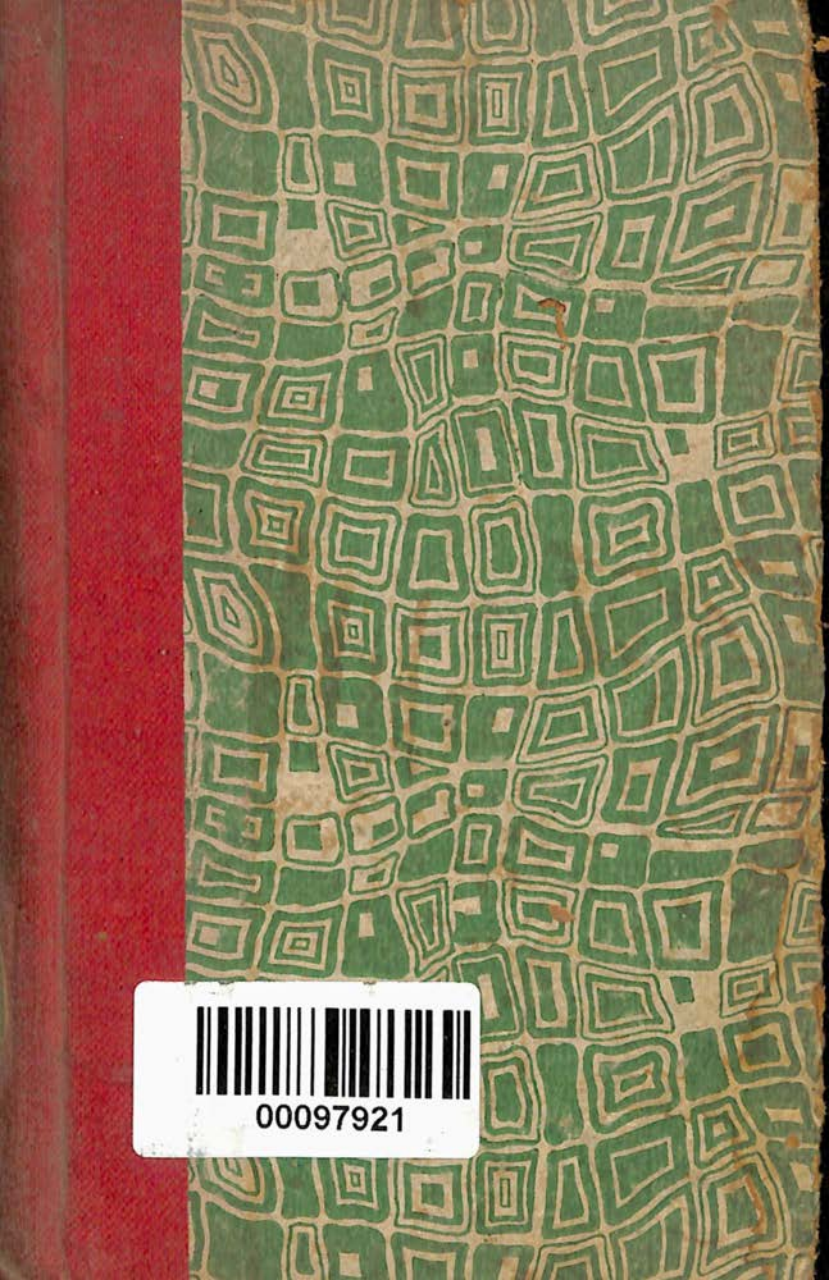
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BRANCH

ANNA SEWARD

Engraved by A. Carden from the original picture painted in 1762 by Kettle in the possession of Thomas White Esq.r Lichfield.

Edinburgh. Published by Mess.rs Constable & Co.rs March 1811

LETTERS

OF

ANNA SEWARD

WRITTEN BETWEEN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1807.

NN. h. 1

IN SIX VOLUMES.

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VOLUME I.

EDINBURGH:
Printed by George Ramsay & Company,
FOR ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND COMPANY, EDINBURGH;
AND LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
WILLIAM MILLER, AND JOHN MURRAY,
LONDON.

1811.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following letter, which was found among Miss SEWARD's papers after her death, will account sufficiently for the present Publication, and renders it unnecessary for the Editor either to enter into any explanation of his motives for undertaking it, or to offer any apology for its appearance.

Posthumous Letter from Anna Seward to Mr A. Constable.

" SIR, *July* 17, 1807.

" IN a Will, made and executed since " I had the pleasure of seeing you in " April last, I have left you the exclu- " sive copy-right of Twelve Volumes

" quarto, half-bound. They contain co-
" pies of letters, or of parts of letters,
" that, after I had written them, appear-
" ed to me worth the attention of the
" public. Voluminous as is the collec-
" tion, it does not include a twelfth part
" of my epistolary writing from the time
" it commences, viz. from the year 1784,
" to the present day.

" I wish you to publish two volumes
" annually; and by no means to follow
" the late absurd custom of classing let-
" ters to separate correspondents, but
" suffer them to succeed each other in
" the order of time, as you find them
" transcribed.

" When you shall receive this letter
" its Writer will be no more. While she
" lives she must wish Mr CONSTABLE all
" manner of good, and that he may en-
" joy it to a late period of human life.

" ANNA SEWARD."

It was in this manner that these letters came into the hands of the Editor; and,

in obeying the direction of their accomplished Author, he is happy to believe that he is, at the same time, contributing not a little to extend her reputation. Miss SEWARD has hitherto been known and admired almost entirely as a writer of poetry. Her attempts in prose have not been considered as equally fortunate; and, it is to be feared, that even in these familiar epistles, several affectations of style, arising mostly from too free an use of poetic imagery, may tend somewhat to obscure their real merit. But when this peculiarity is got over, the reader, it is presumed, cannot fail to be struck with the many intellectual and moral excellencies which they display.

He will perceive throughout, in their Author, an independent and vigorous mind, entering with animation into every subject which is presented to it—full of elevated views,—and uninfluenced by common notions when they were not

brought home to its own perceptions of truth.

In her Critical remarks especially, Miss SEWARD will always be found ingenious and instructive; and, if she sometimes errs in praising her favourite authors with too little discrimination, the error is of that generous kind which marks the warmth of her character, and could proceed only from an enthusiastic admiration of every thing which seemed to her to bear the stamp of genius.

In Politics her opinions are free and spirited; and whatever opinion the reader may entertain of the counsels adopted by this country in consequence of the French Revolution, he cannot but admire the sagacity with which she has predicted many of those unfortunate results which we have since been doomed to deplore.

The ardour of Miss SEWARD's affections is no less conspicuous in these letters than the force of her understand-

ing.—Her long years of dutiful attendance on a father's infirmities; her steady attachment to her friends; her mournful remembrances constantly recurring, of those whom death had separated from her; and the fatal blow which at last withered her existence by depriving her of one of the oldest and dearest of those who remained: These circumstances, which are here exhibited with much nature and feeling, cannot be contemplated without exciting a lively interest in her character; and certainly constitute one of the chief attractions of these memorials of it that are now offered to the public.

The celebrity of this Lady procured her visits and letters from some of the most distinguished individuals of her age —and her long life gave her an opportunity of becoming acquainted with most of the illustrious literary characters who adorned the latter half of the last century. There are accordingly interspersed in these volumes many interesting anec-

dotes of eminent persons, which will probably be not the least attractive part of the Work.

It will be observed, that in one particular Miss SEWARD's directions have not been exactly obeyed. It was thought more satisfactory to the public that the whole of these letters should be laid before it at once, rather than that they should be published as she seems to have wished,—in detached portions. Neither must it be concealed, that some of the letters contained in her bequest have been omitted:—such chiefly as relate to the characters or connections of living individuals, and touch upon circumstances, which although very naturally introduced into letters among friends, were evidently not designed for the world. Some minute critical discussions have also been left out, distinguished indeed by all the acuteness of the excellent writer, but which would have swelled beyond proper limits a work that to many readers may already

appear too long. In every other respect the Editor has been scrupulously faithful to the trust with which he has been honoured.

Miss SEWARD was born in the year 1747, and died on the 25th of March 1809. Her poetical works, accompanied with some part of her early literary correspondence, and a biographical memoir, have since been edited in three volumes, by WALTER SCOTT, Esq. to whom that part of Miss SEWARD's writings had been committed, by a bequest similar to that under which the present Publication appears.

Edinburgh, March 28, 1811.

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LETTERS

OF

ANNA SEWARD.

VOL. I.

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

Miss Powys*.

Lichfield, Oct. 23, 1784.

You have obliged me by the translation of Rousseau's Second Walk. The perspicuity, and beauty of the language, leave no doubt of its doing every justice to the sentiments of the author;—but, good heaven! what are those sentiments? how shockingly unamiable, how totally absurd! Every being of distinguished genius will, from the prevalence of envy, have a number of foes. Is he therefore to conclude human nature incapable of kind and generous affection? Basely shall he suspect, and ungratefully shall he repress, every glow of kindness and benevolence, when it would shine upon him? So doing, Rousseau was not fit

* A lady of abilities and accomplishments, unmarried, and resident at Clifton near Bristol. January, 1810.

to converse with the rest of his species, and was deservedly an outcast from them.

What overweening vanity, as well as dark suspicion, appears in these reveries! No books are worth his attention! He has discovered mankind to be so despicable, its interests are below his care! and he deems the most trivial egotisms a more important legacy to society than any *other* subject of disquisition he could possibly choose. Proud and vain, selfish and cold, indeed, Rousseau didst thou become.—Thy heart had lost its *health*, for *philanthropy* is the health of the *heart*. What splendour of style can have power to shield thy self-sufficient egotisms from just indignation and contempt? Ah! how little do we perceive in *them* of that open, sprightly, affectionate spirit, which warmed and illumined the morning of thy days! gave vigour to thy scientific researches; drew to thee many amiable individuals, who generously waved, in tribute to thy merit, those objections to plebeian birth which prevail in France with a force so generally exclusive; and who, by thus receiving thee into their society, enlarged thy sphere of characteristic contemplation, and enabled thee to trace the motives of human action, in thy enchanting novel, with truth and accuracy. It is melancholy to reflect, on perusing these thy *later* works, how much less estimable thy age

than thy youth; to see *thee* verifying, in thy example, the following exclamation in "the mournful and angry NIGHT THOUGHTS,"

> "How few, of human kind, bring back at *eve*,
> Immaculate, the manners of the *morn!*"

A rheumatic complaint obliged me to make an excursion to Buxton this summer; though most unwilling to leave my dearest father, in his present weak, though not diseased state; but glad tidings of his exemption from every thing like illness blessed my absence, and I found a pleasing succession of animated hours in the medley society of that crowded scene. Many agreeable people sought my regard. Amongst them, my neighbour, the young, the brave, the gallant, unfortunate Captain Arden, who has lost his right-arm in the naval service of this country. He preceded me at Buxton near a fortnight; and, on my arrival, introduced me to all the very desirable intimacies which his pleasing manners had enabled him to form. Soon after I came, the youthful and lovely Lady Foster Cunliffe descended, like a goddess, amongst us. She unites the most engaging affability to the powers of an ingenious mind, and a cultivated understanding, and to the attractions of radiant beauty and majestic grace. She is on a larger scale, both as to face and figure,

but I never saw features, or a countenance so like my lost Honora's. Her complexion is of as glowing bloom, with a superior degree of fairness;—the contour of the face; the form of the mouth; the nose, that between Grecian and Roman, is lovelier than either; the *etherial smile* on the lip, and the bright glance of intelligence and joy, are *all* HONORA. The same soft complacency shone in her eyes while she conversed with me. I was obliged to explain the source of those involuntary tears which so often filled my eyes, as she hung on my arm, in animated conversation. The regret I felt when we parted was extreme,—more indeed than the shortness of our acquaintance warranted, *but* for the influence of this endearing, this *fascinating* resemblance.

— — — — — —

The autumnal glory of this day puts to shame the summer's sullenness. I sit writing upon this dear green terrace, feeding, at intervals, my little golden-breasted songsters. The embosomed vale of Stow, which you know it overlooks, glows sunny through the Claud-Lorain-tint, which is spread over the scene, like the blue mist over a plumb. How often has our lost Honora hung over the wall of this terrace, enamoured of its scenic graces! Never more will such *bright* glances discriminate and admire them. Well do I know

that the sadness of this reflection touches *your* heart as it does mine. *That* source of sympathy between us is sacred, and inexhaustible. Farewell.

LETTER II.

MISS WESTON*

Lichfield, Oct. 29, 1784.

— — — — — —

I have lately been in the almost daily habit of contemplating a very melancholy spectacle. The great Johnson is here, labouring under the paroxysms of a disease, which must speedily be fatal. He shrinks from the consciousness with the extremest horror. It is by his repeatedly expressed desire that I visit him often: yet I am sure he neither does, nor ever did feel much regard for me; but he would fain escape, for a time, in any society, from the terrible idea of his approach-

* An intelligent friend of Miss Seward, residing, at the date of this correspondence, at Ludlow: since married to Mr Pennington, master of the ceremonies at Clifton, near Bristol.

ing dissolution. I never would be awed by his sarcasms, or his frowns, into acquiescence with his general injustice to the merits of *other* writers; with his national, or party aversions; but I feel the truest compassion for his present sufferings, and fervently wish I had power to relieve them.

A few days since I was to drink tea with him, by his request, at Mrs Porter's. When I went into the room, he was in deep but agitated slumber, in an arm-chair. Opening the door with that caution due to the sick, he did not awaken at my entrance. I stood by him several minutes, mournfully contemplating the temporary suspension of those vast intellectual powers, which must so soon, as to *this* world, be eternally quenched.

Upon the servant entering to announce the arrival of a gentleman of the university, introduced by Mr White, he awoke with convulsive starts,—but rising, with more alacrity than could have been expected, he said, "Come, my dear lady, let you and I attend these gentlemen in the study." He received them with more than usual complacence; but whimsically chose to get astride upon his chair-seat, with his face to its back, keeping a trotting motion as if on horseback; but, in this odd position, he poured forth streams of eloquence, illumined by frequent flashes of wit and humour, without any tincture of malignity. That amusing

part of this conversation, which alluded to the learned Pig, and his demi-rational exhibitions, I shall transmit to you hereafter.

LETTER III.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY.

Lichfield, Nov. 7, 1784.

Large is my debt to you, dear friend, for those exquisite, those *living* descriptions of the Alpine scenery, with which you have favoured me. You enable me to see their picturesque wonders without the fatigue and danger of the journey. I explore the Glaciers; I ascend Mount Blanc, and contemplate its varied sublimities with the most awakened enthusiasm. I walk with you to Vevay and Clarens. Why is not Clarens *such* a situation as might enable our imagination to indulge its deceptions; to make those believe, who actually visit that spot, that they tread in the steps of Julie, and St Preux, of Clara, and Wolmar? Ah! it is the vivid glow of these *local* interests that constitutes the highest triumph of genius, after it has delivered an immortal work to the world.

You exchange the magnificent landscapes of Savoy and Switzerland, for the softer environs of Avignon:—but they include VAUCLUSE, whose interwoven recollections will recompense all the inferiority in point of scenery on the laurel-shaded Sorga, compared with that of the mighty Alps, with their stupendous cataracts, green lakes, vine-curtained mountains, and bloomy vallies.—Yes, the spirit of love and poetry will recompense their loss at that consecrated fountain, "Clear as a mirror, as an ocean deep."

The old literary Colossus* has been some time in Lichfield. The extinction, in our sphere, of that mighty spirit approaches fast. A confirmed dropsy deluges the vital source. It is melancholy to observe with what terror he contemplates his approaching fate. The religion of Johnson was always deeply tinctured with that gloomy and servile superstition which marks his political opinions. He expresses these terrors, and justly calls them *miserable*, which thus shrink from the exchange of a diseased and painful existence, which *gentler* human beings consider as the all-recompensing reward of a well-spent life. Yet have not these humiliating terrors by any means subdued that malevolent and envious pride, and literary jealousy,

* Johnson.

which were ever the vices of his heart, and to which he perpetually sacrificed, and continues to sacrifice, the fidelity of representation, and the veracity of decision. His memory is considerably impaired, but his eloquence rolls on in its *customary* majestic torrent, when he speaks at all. My heart aches to see him labour for his breath, which he draws with great effort indeed. It is not improbable that this literary comet may *set* where it *rose*, and Lichfield receive his pale and stern remains.

You will be kindly gratified to hear that I receive the highest encomiums upon my poem, LOUISA, by the first literary characters of the age. I inclose the beautiful eulogium with which it has been honoured from the pen of Mr Hayley. This eulogium appeared in several of the public prints.

The fame of Lunardi's aërial tour must have reached you across the continent. Infinite seems the present rage

> "To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
> And blown, with restless violence, about
> This pendant world."

But unless these adventurers can acquire the power of *steering* their buoyant bark, the experiment is as *idle* as it is *dangerous*.

A violent sprain in my knee, into which the rheumatic propensity of my constitution settled, obliged me to try the Buxton waters, and their bath during a month. I found them restorative, and many social pleasures enlivened the discipline.

— — — — — —

Other agrecable excursions varied my late *summer* days. Part of them, however, were tinged with the gloom of regret, by the death of my dear aunt Martin, whose striking likeness to my yet *dearer* mother, whom I lost in the year 1780, increased the affection which her virtues and long-experienced kindness had inspired. Now, on this wide earth, no resemblance remains to me of that loved form which gave me birth, and which was of such acknowledged beauty, even in waning age. Justly do you speak of the melancholy consciousness produced by this *awful vanishing* of our friends:—but, O! my dearest *father* lives, and has now many months escaped every symptom of that dread-malady which so often threatened to deprive me of the precious blessing of administering to his comforts; of seeing him happy; of receiving his tender endearments. Ere long, I hope, this filial happiness will lure you back to England;—and may it yet be long ere you and I find ourselves deprived for ever of its *sacred* gratifications!

— — — — — —

LETTER IV.

Wm. Hayley, Esq.

Lichfield, Dec. 23, 1784.

At last, my dear bard, extinct is that mighty spirit*, in which so much good and evil, so much large expansion and illiberal narrowness of mind, were blended;—that enlightened the whole literary world with the splendours of his imagination, and, at times, with the steadiest fires of judgment; and, yet more frequently, darkened it with spleen and envy; potent, through the resistless powers of his understanding, to shroud the fairest claims of rival excellence. *Indiscriminate* praise is pouring, in full tides, around his tomb, and characteristic *reality* is overwhelmed in the torrent.

With *me* the month of August passed agreeably away at Buxton, spite of its wonderous paucity as to local graces; yet, when different friends took me in their carriages on morning airings upon the mountains, my eye dwelt with pleasure upon some fine effects of light and shade, the only beautiful

* Johnson.

objects on those high wild hills. What a humid climate! Not a day without rain, and chilling coldness of atmosphere! Once, for about a quarter of an hour, the snow fell in large flakes, and reminded us of Shakespeare's pretty description:

> "The seasons alter, hoary-headed frosts
> Fall in the fresh lap of the damask rose."

But no roses were there to spread their bosoms to such churlish visitors. Surrounded by an agreeable and numerous company, a disposition, social as mine, felt little disposed to mourn over the inverted seasons. We had much *mental* sun-shine; not once, as I recollect, was it overshadowed by tenacious pride, by envy, or by spleen. Thus did cheerfulness, and unanimity, compensate the straightness of our dusky mansion, the inelegance of its board, and the unpleasant effluvias which met us on the staircase, and in every passage.

When the beauteous Crescent shall be finished, and rendered habitable, all these sins against our corporeal senses will probably be reformed.

Dr Darwin called here the other morning. We walked to Mr Saville's garden, accompanied by its owner. Talking about some rare and beautiful plants, Dr Darwin turned to me, and asked if I had seen the CALMIA. On my saying *no*, he

continued—" it is a flower of such exquisite beauty, that would make you waste the summer's day in examining it:—you would forget the hour of dinner; all your senses would be absorbed in *one;* you would be all *eye.*" I smiled, and asked him to describe it: "What, in the first place, was its colour?"—" Precisely that of a seraph's plume." We laughed, as he intended we should, at the *accuracy* of the description. He told us afterward, that he had heard much of the flower, but, as yet, had not seen it.

Mr and Mrs Whalley are just arrived at Avignon. Thus he writes in his last letter: " I have lately made a most agreeable excursion to Lausanne, through the beautiful Pays de Vaud, accompanied by a young Danish nobleman of great merit, fine talents, and polished manners. The situation of Lausanne pleased me more than that of Geneva. It commands a finer view of the lake, is more rural, and less pretending. It is not encumbered, as about Geneva, with a multitude of country-seats, nor insulted by the cropt hedges and formal gardens, which crowd upon the eye round *that* famous city. From Lausanne I took up my staff and walked to explore Vevay and Clarens, rendered so interesting by Rousseau in his immortal ELOISA. Vevay is a neat pretty town, situated at the extreme end of the lake; but Clarens is a beggarly village,

where we find no traces of Julie, Clara, St Preux, or Wolmar. However, the wily peasants have found their account in beguiling the warm imaginations of credulous strangers, and point out, with an air of confidence, the celebrated Elysium of tender memory, and the situation of Wolmar's chateau. From Geneva we came directly hither. At Lyons we took places in the coche d'eau for Avignon, and found our trajet down the rapid Rhine very delightful, adorned as are its banks by numberless villages, vineyards, and the picturesque ruins of ancient castles; yet the banks of the gentler Soane, between Macen and Lyons, charmed us still more, as being more various, more pastoral, and as the different parts of the landscape were more finely contrasted. The celebrated Pont St Esprit, that hangs, with such noble lightness, over the rapid Rhone, pleased us infinitely. We like Avignon, and are settled here for the winter. The provisions are good and cheap, the fruits delicious, the air pleasant, except when the sharp bize pierces to the marrow; but it purifies the air, braces the nerves, and like a skilful surgeon, *cuts* to *cure*."

And now, my dear bard, after having snatched you to the continent by Whalleyan magic, I restore you to Eartham. Suffer me, then, to express my gratitude for the kind attention and ar-

dent welcome with which my poetical offspring has been received in its lovely precincts; for the critical accuracy of those observations which have strengthened their claims to the public smile, and for the generous, the discriminating approbation which has so highly gratified their parent.

"The scoff of spleen shall miss its wounding aim,
For Hayley praises, and his praise is fame."

LETTER V.

Dr Percival of Manchester.

Lichfield, Feb. 17, 1785.

I thank you, Sir, with the fervour of a pleased spirit, for the ingenious pamphlet* you have sent me. The system it holds forth, and, as I think, demonstrates, has long been a favourite hypothesis of mine. Judge, then, with what pleasure I see its rational probability so benevolently, so ably asserted.

* A Tract, by Dr Percival, on the probability that conscious sensation extends through the vegetable as well as animal world.

My intimacy with your publication, the "MORAL AND LITERARY DISSERTATIONS," promising me much gratification, became established soon after I had the honour to address you last, and, contrary to the general consequence of raised expectations, it promised no more than it performed. Nothing can be more just than your general censure of the poetic violations of natural history. Yet, I confess, I think slight and skirmishing allusions to fabulous circumstances have often great beauty. Surely the philosopher should pardon them, when they happily serve the purposes of illustration and imagery. Lucretius has so elegantly, and with such an air of philosophic truth, accounted for what you tell us is an unexisting circumstance, the yellow vision of icteric patients, that a poet must be unwilling to renounce the fable as a source of allusion. Poetic taste surely welcomes it in Mr Hayley's animated couplet concerning the female poets of this country, in his EPISTLES ON EPIC POETRY,—

> "The bards of Britain, with unjaundic'd eyes,
> Will glory to behold such rivals rise."

Nor is the fable, if fable it be, less beautifully introduced in Thomson's Spring, where he describes the passion of jealousy,—

——" The yellow-tinging plague
Internal vision haunts."——

What poet scruples to describe an elegant diminutive female by the expression, fairy-form, or to impersonize unpropitious darkness by calling it —that witch, the night? We must not be too strict with the bards in our demands for the abolition of agreeable fables. Sublime use has been frequently made, by them, of the unphilosophic and long-exploded idea, that the sun is a moving orb. " He cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course." Spenser has clothed the same mistaken idea with yet more splendour.

" And now the golden, oriental gate
Of highest heaven 'gan to open fair,
And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair,
And hurl'd his glistering beams thro' gloomy air."

And Milton,—

" Thou sun, of this great world both eye, and soul,
Acknowledge HIM thy greater.—Sound his praise
In thy eternal course, both when thou climb'st,
And when high noon hast gain'd, and when thou fall'st."

One of the most strikingly exceptionable violations of NATURAL HISTORY is committed by the

generally so very accurate Thomson, whose allusions and descriptions are almost always as faithful to truth, as they are dear to beauty. This violation is found, in a very prominent point of view, even in the beauteous exordium to his SPRING. As Mr Aikin justly observes, that poem opens at the period in which the fairest of the seasons is, in turn, repressed by the roughness of winter, and triumphant over it; but that discerning critic, who makes such a point of fidelity to nature in descriptive writing, shews his partiality to Thomson, and desire of concealing every defect of his, by not pointing out the impropriety of the veil in this vernal personification. It ought to have been composed of the spring-flowers, primroses, violets, hyacincths, &c. instead of those shadowing roses which, in our climate, never appear before the end of June. SUMMER might properly have been invoked to descend, "veil'd in a shower of shadowing roses;" but it is a gross anachronism to attire the SPRING in that ornament.

LETTER VI.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY, ON THE CONTINENT.

Lichfield, March 1, 1785.

IT has lately, dear friend, been my lot again to suffer pained apprehension from seeing the dart of death shaken furiously over the weak frame of my aged father; Sophia's, to mourn the extinction of her revived hopes; and yours, to endure the anguish of losing your tenderly valued friend, in the flower of his youth. "Ah! is this all of thy Chatillion's story." Mournful proof of life's instability!

In the severe disappointment which thus, to you and Mrs Whalley, casts the whole Continent into gloom; thus shrouds all the fair schemes you had planned of visiting, with this amiable and accomplished Savoyard, its varied scenes; my best consolation is, that you are together, and have the power of devoting a portion of every day to the remembrance of him whom you have lost. Indifferent people must soon shew you their weariness of a theme so melancholy; and even your friends, who did not know him, cannot take an

interest so lively in those precious recollections, as will be mutually and equally shared by you. When Adam and Eve are exiled paradise, Milton says,

"They, hand in hand, with wandering steps, and slow,
Thro' Eden took their solitary way."

The little words, "hand in hand," steal, with balmy power, upon the pains of sensibility, while it contemplates that mournful banishment. Were I near you, I should strive to sooth, instead of using fruitless endeavours, by common-place arguments, to banish your grief. I should ask you concerning Chatillion's person, his graces and his virtues. By making them habitually our theme, a lost friend seems not lost; he mingles in our conversation; we see him; we hear his voice; we make our friends see and listen to him; and we imagine that his beatified spirit hovers over us; and that it is not among the least of its delights to contemplate the affection, which thus consecrates his idea in the breast of those who were dearest to him upon earth, and to whom he will soon be reunited in that state, the happiness of which will find its perfection in the consciousness of its perpetuity.

The brilliant bard of Sussex lately sent me a beautifully flattering impromptu from his new

Parnassus; its subject a mistake of his sculptor.

Impromtu by Mr Hayley.

Ye gods, cried a bard, with a classical oath,
Who had order'd the bustos of Pope and of Prior;
That on each side of Seward *, who rivals them both,
They might properly honour that queen of the lyre:

O Jove, he exclaim'd, if I wielded thy thunder,
I wou'd frighten the sculptor who ruins my hope,
Sure never did artist commit such a blunder,
He has sent me a Newton instead of a Pope.

In the wonders of nature Sir Isaac was vers'd,
But, alas! with the nine he had little alliance,
And tho' to the bottom of comets he pierc'd,
He ne'er sounded woman, that much deeper science.

But away, old astronomer! 'tis not thy post!
Here, exclaim'd the vex'd poet, take Newton away;
When, O wonderful speech! in the tone of a ghost,
The meek modest sage thus petition'd to stay:

"Dear irascible bard, be a little more just,
Nor thy sculptor accuse of a careless transaction,
In the shape of a cold and insensible bust,
I am drawn to thy house by the laws of attraction.

* Her picture by Romney.

Tho' sages and bards judge but ill of a brother,
While matter incumbers the spirit of each,
All the children of science are just to each other,
When they soar out of human infirmity's reach:

E'en on canvas thy Seward has virtue to draw
A philosopher's soul from the regions of bliss,
To contemplate her genius may charm him who saw
All the secret sublime of the starry abyss.

Then on *me*, I beseech you, this charge to confer;
Of Seward's attendants I justly am one:
The rapt student of light may well wait upon her,
Whose fancy has all the rich hues of the sun."

LETTER VII.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 15, 1785.

ABSORBED by considerations yet more interesting than even your beautiful writings, I believe my last letter made no comment upon the agreeable hope, extended in the epistle to which it replied, viz. that of seeing a new emanation from our bright fountain of poetic light. Till I feel more assured hope of your restoration to health, I shall look forward to the gratification of

this curiosity in that sort of languor with which a sick man expects his friend to undraw his curtains, after he has been told that morning is arisen in all the summer's glory.

Cruel! Why would you not send me the trimming epigram upon the mitred pedant, who has so despicably criticized your Sargent's beauteous dramatic poem? Not less welcome to me is the gall than the honey of Mr Hayley's pen, since sure I am, that when it flows, it is the hand of justice which lifts the flood-gates. Beattie commends, and calls the indignation generous, with which we smile over the chastisement of the malevolent.

Miss Weston has sent me a most interesting extract from a letter lately received from Mr Whalley, and dated December 1784. There is no resisting the temptation of copying it here for your amusement.

"I have this month visited the celebrated fountain of VAUCLUSE. It is the fullest, purest, and most beautiful source imaginable. So serenely does it sleep in a vast cavern, at the foot of a lofty rock, that not one intruding breath ruffles its azure surface, even while it is sending out an hundred limpid streams from its secret and immeasureable depth. These streams gush out from beneath a shelving bed of huge mossy

stones, in various directions, and unite themselves at once in a little river. But this is its state only when the waters are low. As soon as the first ardent beams of the sun penetrate into the store-houses of the mountain-snows, and send them dissolving through the rocky crevices to replenish the springs, the Fountain of Vaucluse swells, and fills completely the ample cavern in which it now slumbers; and then, scorning even that mound, its waters rush out with impetuous fury at the mouth of the cave, and foam over the rough crags, which now seem to tower far above their reach. Then it is that this overflowing fountain increases the now gentle Sorgue into a wide and rapid torrent, that often deluges the vale.——

—"While I sat and leaned on a rock, what a soft melancholy did the striking scene of tender poetic consecration breathe over my soul! mine, which was so much less affected than that of Petrarch by relative objects and concatenated ideas; but you must not talk of the laurels around this fountain, for there are none, or rather it is abundant in poetic, because imaginary bowers. There can be little doubt, however, that such laurel bowers were contemporary with the poet, planted probably in lavish plenty by his hand, from their similarity to the name of his mistress, and

to his consciousness of the future fame of his verse; but they were not natives of the scene, and time has withered and destroyed every vestige of the aliens. The scenery in reality is that of bare and broken rocks; broken into a thousand fantastic angles, and offering picturesque figures more grand than beautiful. A few straggling olive trees, nitched here and there among the cliffs, seem to strive, with their niggard and insignificant foliage, against the general image of awful barrenness; as a partial ray of light serves only to render more sensible the general blackness of the surrounding clouds. A fig-tree, however, had much interest for me. It grows wild out of the crevice of the principal rock, and immediately over the cavern. The fountain never rises above its roots, which seem planted there as a boundary to its ambition, and as an olive of peace to the affrighted valley when it shrinks beneath the overwhelming waters.

"We purpose staying at Avignon till March, and then removing to some pleasant villa in the neighbourhood of Vaucluse: that, if it can be procured, in which Sterne resided.

"You will ask me if I have seen the original pictures of Petrarch and Laura. Yes, I have seen them, and am almost sorry for it, so agreeable do we find the illusions of our fancy.

Petrarch appears with a rusty doctor's hood; with a sanguine high-fed face, a harsh eye, and, I had almost said, with a libidinous countenance. Laura sticks up, stiff as an hedge-stake, with red locks, stiff top gloves, and smelling at a scarlet poppy, which she holds mincing betwixt her finger and thumb. I have hunted out three couple of their portraits; but found it vain to search for images more congenial to my idea of those charming beings: yet I console myself with exclaiming, 'These are but the painter's daubs; and it was the meanness and grossness of the art, in those early days, that thus disgraced the appearance of the interesting lovers, which far superior pencils would have vainly strove to represent justly."

Is not this very interesting description, my dear Mr Hayley? And now I must tell you how highly I am gratified by the beautiful impromptu upon the mistake of the sculptor, in sending down the busts of Newton and Pope, instead of Pope and Prior, which you did me the honour to purpose placing on each side Romney's picture of me. Such intoxicating flattery has your muse put into the mouth of the supreme philosopher, that I feel more delight to know that my portrait is near him, than even that it should be placed by the brilliant and harmonious Pope. How charm-

ing is your poetical gallantry! If all the testimonies of it, bestowed upon my flattered self, were collected and given to the world, the garlands of Swift's Stella and Prior's Chloe would fade before mine. My pride, my heart exults in these distinctions, conferred by the transcendent English bard of the present æra.

O, certainly! our friend, Mr ——, has true genius, brilliant wit, and the last polish of high-life society; while benevolence and sweet temper are added to these rare endowments. I should extremely regret his habit of passing whole weeks in Lichfield, without calling at this house, if his opinions on works of imagination, and science, and politics, were "one thought more steady than the ebbing sea;" but excessive instability of every sort counteracts the pleasures I should otherwise feel in his company, and reconciles me to the seldomness of his visits. From the gay cordiality with which he always addresses me, I might expect them to be as frequent as in reality they are otherwise. Our dining hour is earlier much than his; and when he does make a morning call here, its bell generally summons me to that meal before he has been with me half an hour. He then always humorously exclaims,

> "Silence that dreadful bell,
> It frights my soul from her propriety."

As to Horace, I can well believe that his odes possess many exquisite graces of expression, too subtly elegant to be fortunately transposed into another language; but I am surprised at the frequently violent transitions in the ideas of these odes. They sometimes put me in mind of a little fat attorney, of whom my mother used to talk, who had an unfortunate habit of citing cases that made directly against the cause he undertook.

One of the Horatian odes begins with adjuring a certain nymph not to cross the seas, lest she hazard a life so precious to him. After enumerating maritime signs inauspicious to her purposed voyage, he reminds her of the fate of Europa, who, when she repented of her expedition, was rallied upon the repentance by Venus. The goddess sarcastically tells her that she was only destined to be the wife of Jove, and to give her name to a third part of the habitable world. How inconsistently does this narrative conclude an ode, whose object had been to dissuade the nymph from her watery journey!

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LETTER VIII.

Lady Marianne Carneqy.

Lichfield, March 21, 1785.

Your Ladyship's kind attention and most welcome letter, highly gratifies, obliges, and honours me. Since I learned the melancholy tidings of dear and honoured Lady Northesk's death, I felt what I believed, an unavailing desire to obtain more particular intelligence than I had the means of acquiring, concerning the welfare and situation of her lord, and of sweet Lady Marianne, whose virtues and graces were in their bud when I had the honour of passing a week in Lady Northesk's, Lady Marianne's, and Mrs Scott's society at Lichfield, in the house of Dr Darwin. Mournful was that pleasure, because of the fearful balance in which then hung the valuable life of Lady Northesk. Ah! with what delight did I learn, from her condescending letters to me, of the return of her health, by the prescriptions of Dr Darwin, after those of the London and Bath physicians

had failed! Sincerely did I deplore the* sudden blight upon those hopes of her long existence, which were inspired by that unexpected, that wonderful recovery.

To be thus engagingly sought, through motives of filial piety, by a daughter of hers, gives me satisfaction, which is not the less poignant for being shaded over by a sense of mournful gratitude to the ETERNALLY ABSENT.

I am happy to hear you say Lord Northesk is well. You do not mention your own health. During that transient residence at Lichfield, I observed, with pain, that your Ladyship's constitution was very delicate. The years of advancing youth have, I trust, brought strength and bloom on their wing.

For both your sakes I regret that intelligent and amiable Mrs Scott is removed so far from you. She must often wish to embrace the lovely daughter of a lost friend;—a friend so dear and so revered!

The style of Lady Marianne's letter convinces me that she has a mind whose tastes, pursuits, and sensibilities, preclude the irksome lassitude

* The author has been since informed, that her friend, Lady Northesk, died by accidentally setting her cap and handkerchief on fire.

with which retirement is apt to inspire people at her sprightly time of life. Ah! dearest Madam, may the consciousness of cheering the declining years of a beloved father gild the silent hours, when the rocks frown around you with solemn sternness, and the winds of winter are howling over the ocean!

Almost five years are elapsed since Dr Darwin left Lichfield. A handsome young widow, relict of Colonel Pool, by whom she had three children, drew from us, in the hymeneal chain, our celebrated physician, our poetic and witty friend.

The Doctor was in love like a very *Celadon*, and a numerous young family are springing up in consequence of a union, which was certainly a little unaccountable; not that there was any wonder that a fine, graceful, and affluent young woman, should fascinate a grave philosopher; but that a sage of no elegant external, and sunk into the vale of years, should, by so gay a lady, be preferred to younger, richer, and handsomer suitors, was the marvel; especially since, though lively, benevolent, and by no means deficient in native wit, she was never suspected of a taste for science, or works of imagination Yet so it was; and she makes her ponderous spouse a very attached, and indeed devoted wife! The poetic philosopher, in return, transfers the amusement of

his leisure hours, from the study of botany and mechanics, and the composition of odes, and heroic verses, to fabricating riddles and charards! Thus employed, his mind is somewhat in the same predicament with Hercules's body, when he sat amongst the women, and handled the distaff.

Dr Darwin finds himself often summoned to Lichfield; indeed, whenever symptoms of danger arise in the diseases of those whose fortunes are at all competent to the expence of employing a distant physician. When I see him, he shall certainly be informed how kindly your Ladyship enquires after his welfare, and that of his family. His eldest son by his first wife, who was one of the most enlightened and charming of women, died of a putrid fever, while he was studying physic at Edinburgh, with the most sedulous attention, and the most promising ingenuity. His second is an attorney at Derby, of very distinguished merit, both as to intellect and virtue;—and your play-fellow, Robert, grown to an uncommon height, gay and blooming as a morn of summer, pursues medical studies in Scotland, under happier auspices, I hope, than his poor brother.

I had the misfortune to lose my mother in the year 1780. My dearest father *yet* lives, but his existence hangs by a very slender thread; since,

however, he suffers no pain, nor depression of spirits, I bless God that he yet lifts up his feeble hands to bless me.

Lady Marianne Carnegy has no reason to doubt her epistolary talents. The proof of their elegance is before me; but dearer far is their *kindness* than their *grace*. Ah! Madam, the affection which that kindness has excited in my heart, creates a tender interest in all you say to me, beyond the reach of literary communication, scenic description, or the most brilliant wit to inspire, unaided by that sentiment which binds me to you!! I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER IX.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, March 23, 1785.

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A character of the late literary Colossus, written by me, appeared in the General Evening Post for December 27th 1784—without my name; because my friend, his daughter-in-law, Mrs Lucy Porter, would resent the fidelity of the

portrait. She thinks he was almost next to the Deity in perfection. Uncultivate minds are always in extremes respecting those high abilities whose elevation they cannot clearly discern. They are sure to contemplate them either with blind adoration, or blinder contempt.

If Dr Johnson's *heart* had been as comprehensively benevolent as his *genius* was comprehensive, the excess of unqualified praise, now poured upon his tomb, had been deserved. Unhappily for his own peace, as for the posthumous fame of our English classics, his adherence to truth was confined to trivial occurrences, and abstract morality, his generosity to giving alms, his sincerity to those he *hated*, and his devotion to the gloom of religious terror. Truth, from Dr Johnson's lip, yielded to misrepresentation in his rage of casting rival-excellence into shade. That generosity, which loves to place exalted genius and virtue in their fairest point of view, was a stranger to Dr Johnson's heart. His violent desire of life, while he was continually expatiating upon its infelicity, the unphilosophic and coward horror with which he shrunk from the approach of death, proved that his religion was not of that amiable species, which smooths the pillow of the dying man, and sheds upon it the light of religious hope.

If the misleading force of his eloquence had not blighted the just pretensions of others, both to moral and intellectual excellence, I should not regret to see Johnson's character invested with this ideal splendour; since I always thought it for the interest of morality and literature, to believe exalted genius *good* as *great*, and, in a considerable degree, exempt from human depravity; such belief having a natural tendency to inspirit the pursuit of excellence, and give force to the precept of the moralist. But since he has industriously laboured to expose the defects, and defame the virtues and talents of his brethren in the race of literary glory, it is sacrificing the many to an individual, when, to exalt *him*, truth is thus involved, and hid in hyperbolic praise.

O England! not less ungrateful than partial is this thy boundless incense. Investing the gloomy devotion and merely pecuniary donations of Johnson with the splendour of faultless excellence, thou sacrificest an hecatomb of characters, most of them more amiable, and some of them yet greater in point of genius, to *his* manes!

Our Cecilian concert was not so full as I have seen it. It was a bad evening, moonless, sleety, and of the most dreary coldness: but Mr Saville and his daughter sang divinely. You, who heard her a year ago warble her wild notes, unassisted

by scientific instruction, would think her wonderfully improved, while you listened to her sweet shake, to those sportive cadences and melting semi-tones lately acquired.

My dearest father has been perilously ill again. Alas! these frequent relapses keep me in constant terror. The anxiety with which I make the morning inquiry after his health, anxiety which commences the instant I awake, is a severe trial upon my nerves.—O! that it may please Heaven to spare him a few more years! I am sure your friendship for me, dear Sophia, will say amen to that prayer of filial affection, naturally increasing with every danger of losing its object.

LETTER X.

JAMES BOSWELL, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 25, 1785.

I regret that it is not in my power to collect more anecdotes of Dr Johnson's infancy. My mother passed her days of girlhood with an uncle at Warwick, consequently was absent from home in the school-boy days of the great man; neither

did I ever hear her mention any of the promissory sparkles which doubtless burst forth, though no records of them are within my knowledge. I cannot meet with any contemporary of those his *very* youthful days. They are all, I fear, like my poor mother, gone to their eternal home, and thus are our fountains of juvenile intelligence dried up. Mrs Lucy Porter, who, were she in health, could communicate more than she would take the trouble of doing, is following apace her illustrious father-in-law. She is now too ill to be accessible to any of her friends, except Mr Pearson; and were it otherwise, I do not believe that a kneeling world would obtain from her the letters you wish for.

On inquiring after Dr Johnson, she has often read one of his recent epistles. As she read, I secretly wondered to perceive that they contained no traces of genius. They might have been *any* person's composition. When this is the case, it is injudicious to publish such inconclusive testimonies. Several letters of his have appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine, that could interest no one by their intrinsic vigour. They will be eagerly read because they are Johnson's; but I have often thought, that we never rise from any composition by the pen of the illustrious, with exactly the same degree of respect for the talents of the au-

thor with which we sat down to peruse it; our mass of admiration is either increased or diminished. If it is but by a single *grain*, that grain is something.

His letter to the Chancellor is a very stiff, indifferent performance, tinctured with a sort of covert resentment to the King, that looks ungrateful for past obligations. I wonder how he could bear the thoughts of such a request being made to his Majesty, since he had a capital of three thousand pounds, out of which he might have drawn to support the expence of continental travelling.

You request the conversation* that passed between Johnson and myself in company, on the subject of Mrs Elizabeth Aston of Stowe Hill, then living, with whom he always past so much time when he was in Lichfield, and for whom he professed so great a friendship.

'I have often heard my mother say, Doctor, that Mrs Elizabeth Aston was, in her youth, a very beautiful woman; and that, with all the censoriousness and spiteful spleen of a very bad temper,

* This conversation, though requested by Mr Boswell, the author believes is not inserted in that Gentleman's Life of Johnson; at least, not in the first edition. Mrs Aston's sister, Mrs Gastrill, being alive when it was published, was, doubtless, the reason why this anecdote was suppressed.

she had great powers of pleasing; that she was lively, insinuating, and intelligent.

'I knew her not till the vivacity of her youth had long been extinguished, and I confess I looked in vain for the traces of former ability.' I wish to have *your* opinion, Sir, of what she was, *you* who knew her so well in her *best* days.'

"My dear, when thy mother told thee Aston was handsome, thy mother told thee truth: She was very handsome. When thy mother told thee that Aston loved to abuse her neighbours, she told thee truth; but when thy mother told thee that Aston had any marked ability in that same abusive business, that wit gave it zest, or imagination colour, thy mother did not tell thee truth. No, no, Madam, Aston's understanding was not of any strength, either native or acquired."

'But, Sir, I have heard you say, that her sister's husband, Mr Walmsley, was a man of bright parts, and extensive knowledge; that he was also a man of strong passions, and, though benevolent in a thousand instances, yet irascible in as many. It is well known, that Mr Walmsley was considerably governed by this lady; as witness Mr Hinton's constant visits, and presence at his table, in despite of its master's avowed aversion. Could it be, that, without some marked intellectual

powers, she could obtain absolute dominion over such a man?'

"Madam, I have said, and truly, that Walmsley had bright and extensive powers of mind; that they had been cultivated by familiarity with the best authors, and by connections with the learned and polite. It is a fact, that Aston obtained nearly absolute dominion over his will; it is no less a fact, that his disposition was irritable and violent. But Walmsley was a man; and there is no man who can resist the repeated attacks of a furious woman. Walmsley had no alternative but to submit, or turn her out of doors."

I have procured, from Mr Levett, of this city, the inclosed copy of an original * letter of Dr Johnson's. Though its style may not bear the stamp of its author's genius, yet it is illumed with a soft ray of filial piety, which cannot fail to cast its portion of additional lustre, however small, on the amiable side of the Johnsonian medal.

The genuine lovers of the poetic science look with anxious eyes to Mr Boswell, desiring that every merit of the stupendous mortal may be shewn in its fairest light; but expecting also, that impartial justice, so worthy of a generous mind,

* This letter appears in Mr Boswell's Life of Dr Johnson.

which the popular cry cannot influence to flatter the object of discrimination, nor yet the yearnings of remembered amity induce, to invest that object with unreal perfection, injurious, from the severity of his censures, to the rights of others.

There can be no doubt of the authenticity of that little anecdote of Johnson's infancy; the verses he made at three years old, on having killed, by treading upon it, his eleventh duck. Mrs Lucy Porter is a woman of the strictest veracity; and a more conscientious creature could not live than old Mrs Johnson, who, I have heard Mrs Porter say, has often mentioned the circumstance to her. It is curious to remark, in these little verses, the poetic seed which afterwards bore plenteous fruits, of so rich a lustre and flavour. Every thing Johnson wrote was poetry; for the poetic essence consists not in rhyme and measure, which are only its trappings, but in that strength, and glow of the fancy, to which all the works of art and nature stand in prompt administration; in that rich harmony of period,

> "More tunable than needs the metric power
> To add more sweetness."

We observe, also, in those infant verses, the seeds of that superstition which grew with his

growth, and operated so strongly through his future life.

I have often heard my mother say she perfectly remembered his wife. He has recorded of her that beauty which existed only in his imagination. She had a very red face, and very indifferent features; and her manners in advanced life, for her children were all grown up when Johnson first saw her, had an unbecoming excess of girlish levity, and disgusting affectation. The rustic prettiness, and artless manners of her daughter, the present Mrs Lucy Porter, had won Johnson's youthful heart, when she was upon a visit at my * grandfather's in Johnson's school-days. Disgusted by his unsightly form, she had a personal aversion to him, nor could the beautiful † verses he addressed to her, teach her to endure him. The nymph, at length, returned to her parents at Birmingham, and was soon forgotten. Business taking Johnson to Birmingham, on the death of his own father, and calling upon his coy mistress there, he found her father dying. He passed all his leisure hours at Mr Porter's, attending his sick-bed, and, in a few months after his death,

* Rev. John Hunter, master of the Lichfield Free-School, by whom Johnson was educated.

† See the Verses on receiving a myrtle from a Lady, inserted in Mr Boswell's Life of Johnson.

asked Mrs Johnson's consent to marry the old widow. After expressing her surprise at a request so extraordinary—" no, Sam, my willing consent you will never have to so preposterous a union. You are not twenty-five, and she is turned fifty. If she had any prudence, this request had never been made to me. Where are your means of subsistence? Porter has died poor, in consequence of his wife's expensive habits. You have great talents, but, as yet, have turned them into no profitable channel."—" Mother, I have not deceived Mrs Porter: I have told her the worst of me; that I am of mean extraction; that I have no money; and that I have had an uncle hanged. She replied, that she valued no one more or less for his descent; that she had no more money than myself; and that, though she had not had a relation hanged, she had fifty who deserved hanging."

And thus became accomplished this very curious amour. Adieu, Sir, go on and prosper in your arduous task of presenting to the world the portrait of Johnson's mind and manners. If faithful, brilliant will be its lights, but deep its shades.

LETTER XI.

MRS KNOWLES*.

March 27, 1785.

So your fair friend, Mrs Hunter, disavows poetic inspiration. This is being very ungrateful to the god of the silver bow, and the nine nymphs in his train. I give her credit for a very feeling heart; but it might have thrilled, and glowed, and melted long enough before it had produced such verses as I have seen of hers, unless she had obtained those delphic irradiations which she, thankless princess as she is, disclaims. When she assures me that they were produced without any efforts of study, I do not doubt her veracity, but the belief doubles my conviction of her obligations to their high mightinesses on the mountain. When you and she would exalt simplicity, that nymph of the valley, into your patron and inspir-

* The celebrated quaker lady who worked the King's picture so admirably in worsted. When Molly Morris of Rageby, she was stiled the beauty of Staffordshire. She survived her husband, Dr Knowles, an eminent physician in London, many years, and died February 4, 1807, aged 80.

ing goddess, you put me in mind of the children of Israel worshipping the calf in Horeb. That gentle-faced idol was just as capable of protecting *them*, as *she* is of producing the wit and oratory of Mrs Knowles, and the poetry of Mrs Hunter. O! to be sure it was simplicity solely who set "Mary Knowles upon one leg in the temple of fame*." Arch and humorous imagination was no agent in producing that odd idea! —but, in truth, all that Simplicity ever did for that gentlewoman was to put on her cap.

Mr Boswell has applied to me for Johnsonian records for his life of the despot. If he inserts them unmutilated, as I have arranged them, they will contribute to display Johnson's real character to the public; that strange compound of great talents, weak and absurd prejudices, strong, but unfruitful devotion; intolerant fierceness; compassionate munificence, and corroding envy. I was fearful that Mr Boswell's personal attachment would have scrupled to throw in those dark shades which truth commands should be employed in drawing the Johnsonian portrait; but these fears are considerably dissipated by the style of Mr Boswell's acknowledgments for the materials I had sent him, and for the perfect impartiality

* Alluding to a humorous description of herself in one of her letters.

with which I had spoken of Johnson's virtues and faults. He desires I will send him the minutes I made at the time of that, as he justly calls it, tremendous* conversation at Dilly's, between you and him, on the subject of Miss Harry's commencing quaker. Boswell had so often spoke to me, with regret, over the ferocious, reasonless, and unchristian violence of his idol that night, it looks impartial beyond my hopes, that he requests me to arrange it. I had omitted to send it in the first collection, from my hopelessness that Mr Boswell would insert it in his life of the Colossus. Time may have worn away those deep-indented lines of bigot fierceness from the memory of the biographer, and the hand of affection may not be firm enough to resolve upon engraving them.

O! yes, as you observe, dreadful were the horrors which attended poor Johnson's dying state. His religion was certainly not of that nature which sheds comfort on the deathbed-pillow. I believe his faith was sincere, and therefore could not fail to reproach his heart, which had swelled with pride, envy, and hatred, through the whole course of his existence But religious feeling, on

* Mr Boswell has strangely mutilated, abridged, and changed the minutes sent him of this conversation. The reader will find them faithfully given in a letter further on, addressed to Mrs Mompesson, and dated December 31, 1785.

which you lay so great a stress, was not the desideratum in Johnson's virtue. He was no cold moralist; it was obedience, meekness, and universal benevolence, whose absence from his heart, driven away by the turbulent fierceness and jealousy of his unbridled passions, filled with so much horror the darkness of the grave. Those glowing aspirations in religion, which are termed enthusiasm, cannot be rationally considered as a test of its truth. Every religion has had its martyrs. I verily believe Johnson would have stood that trial for a system to whose precepts he yet disdained to bend his proud and stubborn heart. How different from his was the death-bed of that sweet Excellence, whom he abused at Dilly's, by the name of the "odious wench!"

Those were shocking suicides which you mentioned. Alas! that vice increases. Infidelity, pride, and extravagance are its general sources; but why an atheist, who groans not under the oppression of poverty and pain, should prefer annihilation to existence, it is difficult to guess. Ennui, whatever discontent it may create, would, one should suppose, be inconsistent with that degree of stimulus which subdues the natural love of life, even where it has nothing new or interesting to present. Next to genuine piety, the love of science is the best preservative against human

misery. Where it exists, novel and interesting objects can never be wanting to shorten the longest summer day. You and I may experience misery, my friend, but we shall never feel the touch of the mental torpedo.

LETTER XII.

COURT DEWES, ESQ

March 30, 1785.

YES, my dear Sir, our great Laureat is indeed a critic, who, if not unexceptionably judicious, does infinite honour to a profession which so many disgrace. His illustrations and decisions are generally the result of a penetrating judgment and a refined taste, united with a long, industrious, and fortunate study of the poetic art. This admirable work, his edition of Milton's Juvenile Poems, with that great mass of fine criticism contained in the notes, ought to recal the opinions of the public from the anarchy into which

* Now deceased. He resided at Welsbourn, near Stratford-upon-Avon;—a refined gentleman and an excellent scholar.

they have been thrown concerning the claims of the British poets, by the misleading sophistry of Johnson in his Lives, and by the fastidious trash of his modern imitators. While the former perplex and dazzle the ingenious, the latter destroy every thing like taste and feeling in the common reader. Thus is the science, and thus are its votaries, "fallen on evil days and evil tongues." May the powers of Mr Warton clear the times from their darkness.

Admirable as this work is, it often carries the charge of imitation upon Milton vastly too far, and sometimes to a ridiculous excess. Among many real proofs which it brings, that Comus frequently imitates Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess, one cannot but smile when such charges of plagiarism as the following are brought against a great bard:

"Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair."—*Comus.*

So Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess,

"A gentle pair have promised equal love."

Mr Warton adds, "other petty pilferings of the same sort might be pointed out, which prove Milton's familiarity with Fletcher's play."

Now, if an author may be convicted of theft upon such evidences, it will be impossible for the

most original genius to produce ten, perhaps two lines, that shall not be equally exposed with Milton's, in this instance, to the charge of pilfering. I thought of the mote and the beam, when I saw Mr Warton observing—that " Milton's expression, ' clad in complete steel,' is supposed to have been borrowed from Hamlet;"—that " critics must shew their reading by quoting books; but that it was merely an expression, in common use, to signify being armed from head to foot."

Now, certainly, " clad in complete steel," is a more striking arrangement of words, and has much more probability of having been borrowed from Shakespeare, than that the simple and usual expression, " gentle pair," should have been stolen from Fletcher.

When passages from various writers resemble each other, we impute such resemblance, according to the degree of its strength, either to coincidence, imitation, or plagiarism. Even the best critics, as Mr Warton evinces in his own example, are too apt to charge ideas and expressions upon imitation and theft, which might fairly be supposed to result from a coincidence.

However, if Mr Warton be too prone to believe that the rich and plenteous imagination of Milton was perpetually stooping to glean from others, he has fully convicted Pope of " sprink-

ling over his Eloisa with epithets and phrases of new form and sound, pilfered from Comus and Il Penseroso:

" And storied windows, richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light."—*Il Pen.*

" And the dim windows shed a solemn light."—*Elo. to A.*

" By grots and caverns, shagg'd with horrid shade."—*Comus.*

" Ye grots and caverns, shagg'd with horrid thorn!"—*Eloisa.*

With other instances as flagrant. Here, indeed, is likeness too strong to be the offspring of coincidence; and, indeed, it is often so in many of Milton's passages. Mr Warton demonstrates, that the general plan of L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, was suggested to Milton by a now-forgotten work of one Burton. Curious is the examination of those rough materials of Burton's, upon which Milton has built such a beauteous edifice.

Mr Warton's two last notes on L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, are some of the most exquisite writing I ever beheld; and the last sentence but one in his preface, is of the sublimest species that oratory has been known to produce. I read them with the same thrill of delight, that the poetry on which they comment inspires; but by what miracle of misconception is it, that he pronounces Milton to have had a bad ear!!

Nothing can be more just than Mr Warton's observation that, " in reading verse, it is better to rest on a general idea, resulting from the whole, when that idea is sufficiently seen, than to seek for the precise meaning of parts." The author might, I think, have extended this rule to every work of imagination, whether in verse or prose.

I am charmed with that admirable sport of fancy, the pretended Continuation of Dr Johnson's Criticism on the Poems of Gray*. I hope it will be generally read, exposing, as it does, in such exact imitation, the absurd, yet plausible sophistry, of that arrogant decider. It also shews the possibility of dissecting so minutely the ideas and images of one of the most perfect poems ever written, the Elegy in a Church-yard, as almost to persuade us that its excellence is not genuine.

No, indeed, my conviction of the high poetic merit of Mr Sargent's dramatic poem, the Mine, has lost none of its ardour. Mr Hayley says it is the worthy rival of Milton's Comus. Perhaps I do not rate its claim quite so high; but I place it on a level with Mason's Caractacus. Judge, then, if I can subscribe to your friend's opinion, that it does not rise above mediocrity!—Why is it that people of fine understanding, and general accuracy

* Written by the very learned and ingenious Professor Young of Glasgow.

of taste, are so often blind to the irradiations of genius, on its first emerging?—but let me reflect that the sweet effusions of Milton's juvenile years, the Lycidas, Comus, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, &c. sunk, on their first appearance, into that oblivion out of which they did not emerge during seventy years. Are the following passages from the Mine of moderate beauty only?

——" 'Tis now three months
Since, on this pendant vault, with trembling hand,
I etch'd the sad memorial of my name,
And on its sparry architrave began
To chronicle each day of growing woe."

——" When thou shalt inhale
The breezy air, and with a thirst as keen
As the parch'd Arab feels on Nubia's sands,
Drink the refreshing stream of living light,
Thy soul-felt ecstasy shall I partake
Mid this abhorr'd privation."

" Stern was his brow, and dark.—As on his feet
They bound the cramping irons, he smil'd in scorn.
With more than curious thought he seem'd to view,
And measure all my form."

——" Sooner could'st thou bid
The floret, that o'er-hangs the stream, and feeds
On its pure essence, live in these dank caves,
Than plant true friendship in our alien hearts.
'Tis but the trail of braided sparks, that fly
In quick succession from the whirling flints,

And stricken steel; for, in this noxious chasm,
Such dense, and sulphurous fumes exhale, as touch'd
By lighted torch, would instant fire the air,
And wrap the caverns in continuous blaze."

Juliana awaking in the Cavern.

———" See, from yon crag she bends,
And lifts her drowsy lids, that hang like clouds
Over the brimming ocean, when the sun
First peeps from the blue wave."

" And canst thou then, thou poor afflicted creature,
Root from thine heart the sense of crowding sorrows;
Long days of hope deferr'd, and nights of weeping,
With all the aches, and sick'nings of the soul;
Canst thou forget these pangs, and on a stranger
Waste generous comfort?"

———" When I behold thee
Environ'd by dim forms, pent in the gloom
Of these abrupt, unorganized caverns,
Mid fierce vicissitudes of heat, and cold,
And sublimated vapours, thy meek carriage
Schools me to patience."

" Scarce can I pierce the air with labouring eye,
Such misty darkness reigns;—yet, near yon rock,
Where drops the lingering stream, a form I see
That rests incumbent on a wrenching mattock,
And seems entranc'd in melancholy thought."

———" Hast thou not sat
Motionless, while he delv'd the rifted rock?
Or, when he sunk beneath the sultry toil,
Brought the cool beverage, and, with gentle hand,

Wip'd from his pallid front faint nature's dew?—
Thou, as he slept, hast thou not stol'n towards him,
And hung in silent gaze o'er his wan cheek,
That on the chill stone rested?"

——"I fain would do so,
And ever in my prayers remember patience;
For hope of better days attends the good,
And virtue, like the wild-bee, can extract,
E'en from the bitter plant, adversity,
Sweet food to cheer the spirit."

Cannot this plenitude of beautiful sentiment, imagery, and description, induce men of taste unanimously to decree the palm of distinguished genius to their author? For my part, I am more and more charmed with the Mine, though I hinted to Mr Hayley, that I thought it had some flat speeches, and several needlessly inharmonious lines; that it might have been more pathetic; and that the language of Conrad had too much purity and tenderness for his licentious character, his villainous designs, the murky scene, and unprotected situation of her whom he endeavours to seduce.

— — — — — —

The first speech in blank verse of the Gnome is perfectly Miltonic; and I scarce know heroic rhymes more sublime than the ensuing:—

"Of hoary fens exalt the stagnant breath,
And load the passing gale with plagues and death!

Thro' yelling gulfs outrageous whirlwinds urge,
Or curl the tossing pool with fiery surge!
Bid flaming cataracts round Vesuvius glow,
Bid Hecla thunder thro' incumbent snow!
From Cotopaxi's heights the deluge pour,
And melt a thousand winters' frozen store!
Beneath the main expansive vapours raise,
And with metallic embers feed the blaze,
Till the black vortex of the water boils,
And Ocean wonders at his new-form'd isles!"

— — — — — —

But perhaps I ought to beg your pardon for thus drenching you perforce with Heliconian dews, springing up at Lavington, the seat of this other bard of Sussex, the emulous friend of the celebrated Hayley. My heart was in the subject, and the midnight clock has struck in vain.—Adieu!

LETTER XIII.

Rev. T. S. WHALLEY, then on the Continent.

Lichfield, April 7, 1785.

SURELY, dear friend, you do not reason like yourself upon the subject of literary fame, when

it is become posthumous; since, however improbable it may be, that its blaze, or its cessation, can be an object of attention to the beatified spirit, whose exertions, while on earth, had produced it; so far, at least, an object of attention as inspiring, or gratifying vanity or ambition; yet, if we retain any consciousness of what passed, and yet passes on earth, when ourselves have soared above it, the consciousness of being remembered with esteem and honour by our fellow-creatures on the score of virtuous compositions, will probably prove a source of delight, worthy to be admitted into the number of angelic gratifications. Grateful to the purest nature must be the consciousness that we had employed the talents committed to our cultivation, in alleviating sorrow and care in our fellow creatures, by compositions that soften, refine, and exalt the human mind; that foster its gentleness, and strengthen its virtue. There surely can be no degradation of angelic dignity, in the belief that it will have pleasure in perceiving that the fruits of its earthly industry continue to inspire virtuous pleasure through passing generations. That charming poem, Edwy and Edilda, so justly styled, by the Monthly Review, a domestic epic poem, is eminently calculated to improve and delight the mind of youth; and I repeat my exhortations, that you will re-

publish it with its new termination, so much more consonant to poetic justice, and the gratification of the reader.

You quote Madam Genlis. Do you not object to her system concerning the choice of books for young people? She wishes that authors of first-rate excellence should be withheld from our youth, during those fresh and vivid years, when the perceptions are in their first poignancy.

I differ from her totally. Whatever books are put into the hands of sensible ingenious young people, between the age of twelve and eighteen, will, I am convinced, fix their taste in reading. A work of mediocrity, if it is in any degree interesting, will, during that lively interval, inspire more delight, than can be produced by compositions of a far higher class, when the first fine edge of the feelings is taken off. The mind always acquires a fond predilection for that species of writing which had borne away the early fruits of its ripening sensibilities. It is therefore of the utmost importance to the future strength of intellect, that the literary taste in opening youth be set high.

What a treasure is your last letter! How completely does it place us in scenery so inevitably dear to a poetic imagination! As late you shewed me the calm, so now you make me see the

swoln and agitated waters of Vaucluse; and each are alike interesting. Ah! those cypresses!—what striking memorials! The detestable portraits of Petrarch and Laura, in the Castle of Sommane, ought to make people, whose personal representation is likely to interest generations yet unborn, careful how they leave behind them disagreeable pictures, which must hereafter disappoint the anxious gazer, and outrage his imagination, by forcing upon it an idea uncongenial to his preconceptions, and destructive of their enthusiasm.

The winter has been, with us, very long and severe. A sharp, gloomy, and steril frost, attended with frequent storms of snow, even yet

> "Chills our pale morns, and bids the driving sleet
> Deform our days delightless."

By this time, it is broad and sultry summer with you. I know how much you luxuriate in glowing suns, and I hope you enjoy them on your classic plains of Petrarchian consecration. But I had much rather you were, at this instant, rubbing your hands over an English fire, and breathing phillipics on our wayward and disappointing climate.

LETTER XIV.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, April 10, 1785.

HEALTH is become to me a very rigorous task-mistress. The exercise she exacts most inconveniently abridges my epistolary leisure.

Mr Boswell lately passed a few days in Lichfield. I did not find him quite so candid and ingenuous on the subject of Johnson, as I had hoped from the style of his letters. He affected to distinguish, in the despot's favour, between envy and literary jealousy. I maintained, that it was a sophistic distinction, without a real difference. Mr Boswell urged the unlikelihood that he, who had established his own fame on other ground than that of poetry, should envy poetic reputation, especially where it was posthumous; and seemed to believe that his injustice to Milton, Prior, Gray, Collins, &c. proceeded from real want of taste for the higher orders of verse, his judgment being too rigidly severe to relish the enthusiasms of imagination.

Affection is apt to start from the impartiality of calling faults by their proper names. Mr Boswell soon after, unawares, observed that Johnson had been galled by David Garrick's instant success, and long eclat, who had set sail with himself on the sea of public life; that he took an aversion to him on that account; that it was a little cruel in the great man not once to name David Garrick in his preface to Shakespeare! and base, said I, as well as unkind. Garrick! who had restored that transcendent author to the taste of the public, after it had recreantly and long receded from him; especially as this restorer had been the companion of his youth. He was galled by Garrick's prosperity, rejoined Mr Boswell. Ah! said I, you now, unawares, cede to my position. If the author of the Rambler could stoop to envy a player, for the hasty splendour of a reputation, which, compared to his own, however that might, for some time, be hid in the night of obscurity, must, in the end, prove as the meteor of an hour to the permanent light of the sun, it cannot be doubted, but his injustice to Milton, Gray, Collins, Prior, &c. proceeding from the same cause, produced that levelling system of criticism, "which lifts the mean, and lays the mighty low." Mr Boswell's comment upon this observation was, that dissenting shake of the head,

to which folk are reduced, when they will not be convinced, yet find their stores of defence exhausted.

Mr B. confessed his idea that Johnson was a Roman Catholic in his heart.—I have heard him, said he, uniformly defend the cruel executions of that dark bigot, Queen Mary.

— — — — — —

Warton's Milton, Mr Hayley!—I am sure you are charmed with it. But how melancholy are the reflections which result from its information, that the Lycidas, Comus, and Il Penseroso, the Sonnets, in short, all the juvenile works of that immortal poet, remained in oblivion full twenty years after the Paradise Lost had emerged. It proves the absolute incompetence of the public to discern and estimate the claims of genius, till, by the slow accumulation of the suffrage of kindred talents, it is taught their value. If, as I begin to fear, from what two men of talents, who ought to know better, say of the Mine, that fine dramatic poem should sink, for some time, beneath the fastidious coldness of modern criticism, we may address its author in the words of his great model,—

" So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,
But yet, anon, exalts his drooping head;
New tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.

LETTER XV.

MRS BROOKE *.

Lichfield, April 21, 1785.

I DEPLORE what you tell me of our good Baron Dimsdale's illness; and am a fellow-sufferer with him, from a frequent and oppressive pain at my stomach, and shortness of breath. It has made me seem of late to neglect many of my correspondents.

It is with regret that I hear you say we are not likely soon to see another charming work of yours. I pity you for the harassing number of those complex circumstances, which force into exertion the energies of your spirit, without the power to interest your affections, or awaken your imagination.

> " What needs a mind-illumin'd breast for those,
> Heart-melting thoughts, or fancy like the sun?"

* Author of Lady Julia Mandeville, Emily Montague, &c. She generally resided with an aunt in Lichfield, and was a near relative of Dr Brooke, rector of Birmingham, the friend and contemporary of Dr Johnson.

There is no parodying a passage in Milton, without speaking of the late literary treasure, Mr T. Warton's edition of Milton's juvenile poems. Its critical notes have all the eloquence and strength of Johnson, without his envy. Johnson told me once, "he would hang a dog that read the Lycidas twice." "What, then," replied I, "must become of me, who can say it by heart; and who often repeat it to myself, with a delight 'which grows by what it feeds upon?" "Die," returned the growler, "in a surfeit of bad taste."

Thus it was, that the wit and awless impoliteness of the stupendous creature bore down, by storm, every barrier which reason attempted to rear against his injustice. The injury *that* injustice has done to the claims of genius, and the taste for its effusions, is irreparable. You, my dear Madam, I am assured, have sense to perceive, and generosity to deplore its consequences.

LETTER XVI.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, May 27, 1785.

No, no, my ever esteemed friend, I cannot believe that Mr Hayley's friendship for Mr Sargent shews him unexisting poetic beauties in that gentleman's fine dramatic poem, the Mine; because I am perfectly sure that personal regard or dislike never raises in my own brain the illusions of prejudice for or against a literary composition. It is true, where I know that a brilliant or sublime work has proceeded from a hand I love, *that* consciousness increases the delight I feel in examining its features; but the delight must first spring from the merit of the author, not that of the man.

I love Mrs K——, think her letters and conversation abound with genius; yet I cannot admire her verses. Dr Johnson's character and manners always excited much more of my indignation than esteem, yet do I continually shed tears of rapture over such of his writings as are free from the envious taint of his disposition. My

personal knowledge of Mr Sargent is very slight, were personal knowledge apt to influence me:—but if the Mine is not, upon the whole, a composition of very considerable poetic merit, I have wholly mistaken the nature of poetry. When I observed to its author, that some of the lines in the dialogues had a certain roughness which might disgust the fastidiousness of modern taste, it is curious that he accounts for this roughness exactly as you do for the many inharmonious lines in Comus, which I am very certain are more harsh, and more frequent than in the Mine. The poems being of much the same length, if the ancient judged right, as you say he did, to set off, by contrast, the more melodious passages, the modern is justified in following his example. Mr Sargent tells me, that it was his choice to relieve his lawn by some inequalities, though he wished not to introduce into it the asperities of Stone-Henge.

The Critical Review does justice to the splendour of Mr Sargent's poem. Its strictures upon it breathe a poetic sensibility far more than usual with those cold gentlefolk, the public critics, and of nice and just discrimination rarely found on their pages.

I declare to you, my dear Sir, that I am all astonishment how you can endure *my* poetry, if

you think a work, which holds the light of genius so far above me; destitute of its great essentials. Permit me to thank you very warmly for shewing me the impropriety of my epithet *swart* for a sunbeam. Misled by the "swart star" of Milton, I had associated no other idea but that of sultriness to the word, nor once reflected that, in using it for noon-day heats, I imputed the effect to the cause. I altered *swart* into *fierce* in the copy I intend for my miscellany, the instant I had read your last letter. Be assured I shall always receive your observations upon any thing I write with the most cheerful gratitude, and endeavour to avail myself of them. Never yet have I felt the slightest reluctance to kiss the rod of friendly criticism. There are strange mistakes of press in my panegyric sonnet on the Mine, which I sent to the Gentleman's Magazine.

So we have lost the poet laureat. I always thought Mr Whitehead's abilities to considerable for that rhyming drudgery; and now a yet greater bard undertakes the labouring oar of the boat which is to row our Monarch over one of the Pierian rivers.

Our concerts this winter have been very delightful. Mr Saville's songs are always exquisite; and his fair pensive Philomel improves in every exertion. Attending frequently to Mr Saville's

manner of instructing his daughter in a song that is new to her, it is curious to observe on what nice touches musical expression depends, and how necessary a feeling heart, and even poetic taste, to enable a professor to teach his pupils to sing with elegance, pathos, and grace. Adieu.

LETTER XVII.

DR S———.

Lichfield, June 7, 1785.

THAT poetic criticism had been so much your study, I did not indeed know till I learnt it from your last letter. It was my idea, that the more important sciences had left you little time for the muses. Suffer me to observe, that was the highest compliment I could pay to the understanding of any man, who considers Mr ——— as a feeble poet.

The misunderstood observation of Horace,—

> "Not to admire is all the art I know,
> To make men happy or to keep them so,"

has made thousands fastidious, inducing them to fancy such cold temperament a proof of wisdom and philosophy; but it is impossible Horace could stupidly assert, that insensibility to excellence was the means of happiness. By the word *admire*, he meant *wonder*. "We ought not to wonder or be astonished at any of the events in life." His axiom can extend no farther in all common sense. Our English poets have used *admire* as synonymous to *astonish*. After Macbeth's repeated starting from the banquet, his wife exclaims—

> "You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting
> With most admir'd disorder."

Misapprehension of the Horatian maxim has destroyed the powers of just criticism in countless minds, who might otherwise, perhaps, wishing to obtain a taste for classical excellence, have accomplished that desire, by indulging the habits of pleased attention to every various grace and beauty in poetic science.

The line you quote from Pope, about pure description holding the place of sense, has occasioned numbers, upon whom Nature never meant to inflict such an infirmity, affect, and in time acquire, blindness to the charms of poetic imagery,

and poetic landscape. Those enchanting compositions, the Seasons, are almost wholly descriptive; yet know I not any poetry more capable of exalting the imagination, and expanding the heart.

As for your dislike to imperfect rhymes, which you would not allow, except in passages which express conflicting emotions, I will venture to assert, that, in general, whoever looks on poetry with the painter's eye, will find himself as little disposed to quarrel with his author for an imperfect rhyme in a passage of scenic description, as in one that conveys the struggles of impassioned affection. All our best writers continually give us precedents for their usage. A poet will lose much more on the side of sense, and grace of expression, than he will gain on the side of jingle, by narrowing his scale of rhymes in the pursuit of imaginary perfection, which, when attained, cloys the very ear by its sameness. Pope, the most musical of all our bards, gives us the imperfect rhymes very lavishly in all his verses, and equally in his picturesque as in his pathetic passages. Out of instances innumerable, I shall select a few.

"First, rob'd in white the beauteous nymph adores,
With head uncover'd, the cosmetic powers," &c.

" Soft yielding minds to water glide away," &c.
" And sip, with nymphs, their elemental tea," &c.

" Late as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air,
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star,
I saw," &c.

Rape of the Lock.

" So Zembla's rocks, the beauteous work of frost,
Rise high in air, and glitter on the coast."

Temple of Fame.

One of the most musical of all his ever-musical couplets rhymes imperfectly; sufficient proof that such imperfection does not of itself wound the ear: observe it—

" Let softer strains ill-fated Henry mourn,
And palms eternal flourish round his urn."

Windsor Forest.

You profess also an aversion to notes in poetry. In the extract I sent you from Dr Darwin's beautiful poem, yet unpublished, the Botanic Garden, you spurn the note concerning the vast variety of mosses, and call it pedantic, because it tells you what you already know. To me, and to thousands, who may feel the poetic beauties of this work, the note is interesting and instructive. All poetic allusions to facts, or to branches of science, not universally known, demand notes. Mr Aikin,

in his charming treatise on the application of natural history to poetry, exhorts the bard to avail himself of philosophical illustration; but almost every allusion to modern philosophical science, requires a note to make it generally understood, since minute explanation cannot, with any happiness, be committed to verse. That note, which men of science, who are sometimes apt to discard that useful guide, *common sense*, in their decisions, deem impertinent, superfluous, pedantic, becomes the vehicle of much useful instruction, by generalizing the knowledge of many a curious fact. Unanswerable and self-evident is the assertion, that those who understand a passage in which a circumstance, not universally known, is alluded to, are absurd, if they stop themselves to examine that note which kindly explains it to the less learned reader; but to the scholar, where is the inconvenience that it is there? Does he grudge its obliging him to turn over his leaf a few seconds the sooner for the space it occupies? It is better that they, who have previously dined, should see a banquet before them, than that the hungry should want food. I have eaten, and am satisfied, says the selfish epicure; I hate the sight of this meat. Cannot you let it alone then, and give me leave to eat, who want sustenance?

One excellence in Mr ———'s poetry, above that of other writers, is the light thrown by it, and by its valuable notes, upon various sciences. No person can be familiar with his writings, without acquiring from them a very competent fund of knowledge in history, biography, and in the elements of art and science.

All you say on the subject of our friend's temper, is, I must reluctantly acknowledge, but too just; yet, was his disposition so meliorated and illumed by the flattering prospects then playing before him in delusive vision, that the unalloyed pleasure his society gave me, obliterated from my memory all traces of that tetchy unprovoked spleen, which had often dashed our intimacy with bitterness. Your recent observations concerning its teasing influence, acted upon those traces like fire upon characters written with lemon juice. I sigh as they appear again before me, clouding and staining the lustre of fine talents, and many excellent qualities. Ah! pity that they ever existed,

> "To quarrel with the noblest grace he owns,
> And put it to the foil!"

Let us all take warning, and correct our acids and sub-acids of every sort.

LETTER XVIII.

To Miss Helen Williams.

Lichfield, Aug. 25, 1785.

I WRITE to you, dear Helen, amidst the bustle of those feminine preparations, which necessarily precede the design of attending an harmonic festival at Manchester, where the abbey drums are to thunder, Mara exhibit vocal miracles, and, what is much more to the genuine lovers of musical pathos and energy, our friend Saville is to open the Messiah, and take all the principal tenor and contra-tenor songs. He unites poetic taste, and the vivid emotions of a feeling heart, and of an high and kindling spirit, to a rich, extensive, and powerful voice, and the most perfect knowledge of his science. It is the former which direct, with unerring power, the energy and pathos of his expression. Others sing with as much, perhaps more musical fancy, and artful elegance; but he alone, of all his brethren of the lyre, sings with impulses congenial to those with which Milton wrote and Handel composed, though he never aims to dazzle or astonish his audience.

I long to see your poetic spectres, whose mournful habiliments will, I am sure, be woven by the hand of genius.

The dear bard has been so good as to send me Boyd's translation of Dante into English verse. Appearing after Mr Hayley's version of the three first cantos of the Inferno, it suffers by a comparison with their matchless excellence; yet, even had he condescended to lead us through the long succession of fiery furnaces, the result must have been a certain weary horror, of which we grow impatient. The Dantean Angel of Vengeance is diabolically insatiable; and *this* seems to me the sum and substance of his inflictions,—

> Immerse him in that boiling tide,
> Then on yon gridiron burn him;
> And, broil'd for ages on one side,
> I prithee, devil, turn him.

The last letters I received from Mr and Mrs Whalley, were written from their summer retreat, in the neighbourhood of Vaucluse, seven miles from Avignon. Their villa commanded a view of what appears like an immense park, graced with the shade of innumerable mulberry trees. Beyond the considerable extent of open ground, various landscapes present themselves, rich in chateaus, villages, and ruins, while the Alps of

Dauphiné form a majestic back-ground, and close the scene. Mr Whalley speaks with delight of their little green drawing-room, whose windows are curtained with foliage from a small grove of planes, elms, and flowering limes. Between the irregular trunks of the trees, and beneath their branches, are seen the pure waters of the Sorgue. They are perfectly azure, and flow an hundred yards distant from this romantic habitation. Think, dear Miss Williams, how the consciousness of this river's poetic consecration, by Petrarch, must enhance the delight with which the kindred spirit of Mr Whalley gazed on its waves, as they wandered by this villa. He tells me, that, to complete the magic of the scene, their near grove was the mansion of nightingales, which, when he wrote, were in full song.

Many English families of rank, residing for a time at Avignon, followed our friend's example, and formed a sort of colony in the muse-hallowed scene; pleased with the idea of passing a summer in the vicinity of that immortal fountain and valley, which had witnessed the beauty of Laura, and heard the songs of Petrarch,

"That spread the fame of his disastrous love."

Adieu!

LETTER XIX.

To Mrs G———.

Lichfield, Aug. 27, 1785.

Be assured, dear Madam, it was with no cold ear that I listened to Dr B———, when he talked to me of the obligations which Lord H——— acknowledged to the valour and conduct of your gallant brother-in-law. Yet, had my spirit still more fervently hailed a theme so welcome, but for the consciousness, which your late letters have inspired, that this distinguished supporter of our naval glory was less sensible than he ought to be of your merit, and of those tender and constant attentions, with which your high-strung esteem impels you to honour him.

Will you, however, forgive me, if I observe, that, as his virtues are cast in a sterner mould than yours, the effusions of so poignant a sensibility may probably not only be incomprehensible, perhaps they are displeasing. Do they not seem a tacit reproof to his own colder temperament? They may perhaps more induce him to question the sincerity of your regard, than to tell himself

that he is ungrateful. Heroic spirits are often proud ones; and pride will not endure the weight of incessant obligation. Affection, we all know, is the only coin in which we can be allowed to repay our debts to that affection which is demonstrated for us. Where native disposition brings on inevitable insolvency, how can the noble mind observe, without pain, the sum of those debts increasing by hourly accumulation?

Since you hint to me, that your brother seems rather oppressed than gratified by the generous extreme of so much apparent veneration, I could wish you to avoid letting him perceive its fervours: that you would demonstrate only such a degree of it as he can hope to equal and return. We must rein in our enthusiasms towards those who are not themselves enthusiasts, lest the warm ingenuous heart defeat, by its excess, its dearest purposes.

I cannot doubt your having been infinitely amused by Mr Boswell's tour. The general style is somewhat too careless, and its egotism is ridiculed; but surely to the cold-hearted and fastidious reader only, will it seem ridiculous. The slip-shod style is richly compensated by the palpable fidelity of the interesting anecdotes; the egotism, by that good humoured ingenuousness with which it is given, and by its unsuspecting

confidence in the candour of the reader. The incidents, and characteristic traits of this valuable work, grapple our attention perforce. How strongly our imagination is impressed when the massive Being is presented to it stalking, like a Greenland bear, over the barren Hebrides, roaming round the black rocks, and lonely coasts, in a small boat, on rough seas, and saluting Flora Macdonald in the Isle of Sky!

When shall I have the happiness to salute you and Mr G—— at Lichfield? You have allowed of an hope so agreeable, but the hour of realization is long delayed. Come, and persuade the gallant "chief of the stormy seas," to make your party a trio. We will see if we cannot teach him to associate with the adventurous spirit of ancient chivalry, that high value of female esteem, which, in purer and happier times, was its inseparable companion.

We shall soon, I trust, meet at Manchester, hear the vollies of the abbey drums, see Mara exhibit ballooning vocalities, and our friend do the noblest justice to the inspirations of Handel. Some spirit, friendly to the juster conceptions of the art, early in life whispered Saville,

"Ah friend! to dazzle let the vain design,
To raise the heart, and touch the soul, be thine."

I am sure you will agree with me, that the judicious admonition was not breathed in vain.

LETTER XX.

To Mrs Cotton.

Lichfield, Oct. 27, 1785.

It is longer, I believe, than we both wish, since we heard from each other. I hope the summer has passed pleasantly with you as with myself. The graceful and eloquent Miss Weston being my guest, inspirited, by her society, its sultry days. We went together to a brilliant music-meeting at Manchester last month, where, amidst the collected musical strength of the kingdom, Mara and Saville had the leading parts, and filled them to the high delight of their auditors. Sophia and myself joined a very agreeable party from Derbyshire, Mr and Mrs G——, and a pleasing young lady, her friend, and Mr G——'s brother, a sea-officer, of distinguished bravery and skill in his profession. My poor father has been very ill since our return, but is now recovered.

Mrs G—— is a very singular, but very charming being. Her figure has uncommon elegance: but it is more the result of native grace than of fashion. Her complexion brunette, without bloom; nor are her features regular, but perfectly feminine, and very attractive. Nothing can be more beautiful than her black eyes. They are exactly those of Fatima, as described by Lady M. W. Montague in her letters; have that length, horizontally, which always gives languishing sweetness. Mrs G——'s eyes speak a thousand soft affectionate meanings through the dark fringe which encircles them.

This lady was married quite a girl to Mr G——, more than old enough to have been her father. He is a gentleman of large fortune, light and alert in his figure, devoted to the sports of the field, without neglecting the treasures of his library; friendly and hospitable, with a great deal of that dry sarcastic, and, as Sterne calls it, sub-acid humour, which forms a diverting contrast to the pensive, impassioned, perhaps romantic, enthusiasm of his lady's character.

I have been told it was his marriage stipulation that she should be content to live wholly in the country, without requesting to go to Bath or London. In all other respects, he is the most indulgent of husbands, animating her retirement

with that liberal welcome, which their friends, of both sexes, always find to his house, and to his plenteous and epicurean table. Living thus totally among the shades, her mind has nurtured, beneath their umbrage, the high-strung propensities of a warm heart, and vivid imagination. She reads a great deal; but I should suppose chiefly writings of fancy. Ingenuous, disposed to think the best of everybody, she shapes her favourites, of both sexes, into the resemblance of all she has read of refined, amiable, and exalted. Hence, where others would esteem, Mrs G—— venerates; where others would admire, Mrs G—— worships. Heroes have ever been her idols; but the house of a country gentleman is not the place where heroes are often found. The gallantry of her brother-in-law, Captain G——'s conduct, the honourable mention made of it in the public prints, and in the world, had prepared the lovely devotee to glory, to deify him in her imagination, whom it had pictured a Cæsar, an Alexander.

But, from the native unvarnished plainness of his person, character, and manners, he neither desired nor understood what it was to be idolized by a fine young lady, on the score of that tried valour, which, whatever high reputation it had obtained, his honest heart, a stranger to self-valuing presumption, considered not as constituting any

claim to marked distinction. He was, in all likelihood, unaccustomed to receive it from the fair ones of our sex, in these anti-chivalry times, in which an elegant cold-hearted lounger of fashion excites attentions they would not dream of bestowing upon the brave veteran, who had not been accustomed to entwine the myrtle with his laurels.

Before I had ever seen this gentleman, Mrs G——'s letters had in such sort mentioned him, as, in spite of my consciousness of the leaf-gold she is wont to spread over her favourite characters, taught me to expect attractions dangerous to the peace of a young woman married to her grandfather. Nor was I sorry to find the fair enthusiast complaining that her exalted brother, as she called him, repaid her revering affection with cold neglect.

You will conclude me not a little internally diverted, when I beheld in this fancied Alexander, a somewhat coarsely, large, and hard-featured man, looking older, though he was not older than his brother,

"Full of odd oaths, and bearded like a pard."

I was, however, comforted by the non-existence of that graceful dignity of form and address, which

possessed, might have exhibited a formidable contrast to the sub-acids of our grandfather.

Still more was I diverted to see the lady, fast bound in the spells of her hero-partialities, sit gazing at the honest veteran, like a Catholic pilgrim upon her favourite saint, fixing upon him her solicitous dewy eyes, that seemed fearful of offending the majesty of super-human excellence by the intenseness of their homage.

The good Captain knew not what to make of all this admiring veneration; but he constantly addressed her with jesting familiarity, which, though kind, she took for want of respect; yet seemed she rather pensively humbled than offended by the freedoms, not much calculated to the meridian of super-worldly refinement. "Damn it, where's Madam?"—'Here, my noble brother, too much honoured in your inquiry.'—"Well then, zoons! come down stairs; the Concert Room will be full, and the devil a place shall we get."

Now, you must not suppose from all this, that Mrs G—— is weakly ridiculous. Her manners, her language, though entirely unique in these days, become her infinitely. There is a certain naiveté in her elevations, which preserve them from appearing fustian. She tastes the beauties

of every thing she reads with discriminating fervour. Her observations often discover powers of mind much above the level of the many who ridicule that singularity, which has been the result of seclusion, want of knowledge of the world, and of judging of mankind from the representations of the bard and the novelist. If her friends possess any one good quality, or pleasing accomplishment, she assimilates their whole mind and manners to her high standard of visionary excellence.

Walking with her caro sposo in his gardens, in our first acquaintance, we beheld the graceful mistress of the domain approaching us, with a group of her favourites of both sexes.—" O ! damn it," exclaimed sub-acid, " here comes my wife and her angels."

He perfectly understands her character, is diverted with the altitudes of his lovely Quixotte, and has the good sense to smile at what would furrow, with jealous frowns, the brow of a less discerning Being. So much for Mr and Mrs G——.

Every harmonic meeting I attend leads me to ponder with new astonishment, the universal affectation of musical feeling, while the audience evince so little of its reality. How often do we perceive them either not listening at all, or with the most languid attention, to the sublimest com-

positions, both vocal and instrumental; to which, when a trifling ballad has succeeded, its notes have been imbibed with eager transport, and dismissed with vollies of applause. A great master takes a common country-dance as the subject of his solo, and forms, upon that worthless ground, the most elegant embroidery that florid and inventive fancy, united to consummate taste, can produce. Strange it is, to observe no general transport expressed during those daring efforts of ingenuity, while his return to Malbrook, or "Come, haste to the wedding," has been hailed with the glance of delight from a thousand eyes.

By the same prevalence of bad taste, have I seen a London audience neglect the delicate and pathetic songs of the late Miss Linly, when the more powerful, but coarser and inexpressive tones of the then Miss Philips, now Mrs Crouch, were received with the loudest manual acclamation. I have, therefore, my doubts, whether Mrs Smith, whose voice is of such transcendent sweetness, who melts her liquid notes into each other with such charming flexibility, wanting the power to make a great noise, could ever be a popular public singer. But her father will never venture to launch her timid bark upon the capricious tides of metropolitan favour.

It was at Manchester that I beheld, for the first time, the new-risen star of the harmonic world, Mara. Her fires are very dazzling, it must be confessed. She has, however, some harsh notes in the lower part of her voice, when she throws it out fortissimo; and the excursive cadences she uses are too gay ornaments for the mourning robes of Handel's solemn songs.

Her Italian pathetic songs are enchanting;—her bravura ones stupendous;—but those violent efforts, though miraculously successful, were as unpleasing to my ear, as they were visibly painful to the Syren who hazarded them. Ah! it was not tones in such supernatural altitudes that made Ulysses struggle in his voluntary chains.

Certainly, however, Mara is a glorious singer. It is the false taste of the multitude which tempts her to aim at astonishing her audience, rather than affecting their passions.

The winds of autumn are beginning to blow hollow and winterly, and to mourn around these bowers; and her umbrage is changing its varied and mellow tints, for the dim green and sickly yellow. How partial is nature to that last named colour!—it is the first hue of her flowers, and the last of her leaves. But how different the golden glow of her crocus-borders, in the infancy of the year, to the wan lemon-tint upon the leaf that clings

trembling to the naked spray, and quivers in the bleak gale!

Lichfield has lost many of those inhabitants whose society used to gild the gloom of the approaching season; but a few are yet within her mansions,—

> "Who, when it falls, and when the wind and rain
> Beat dark December, can right well discourse
> The freezing hours away."

Adieu.

LETTER XXI.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 23, 1785.

I TAKE up my pen to you on the eve of a wintry excursion over roads white with snows, and in defiance of the keen Eurus. My purposed visit is to Mr Dewes, at his seat in Warwickshire. Of his talents and worth I have before spoken to you. His lovely sister, Mrs Granville, meets me there. Though an esquire and a justice, he little resembles his brethren of that tribe. Last summer, he told me, he had danced up to town, in a herd of

them, to the Handelian commemoration, like the brutes after Orpheus.

My dear father's health seems to have recruited much since his last paralytic seizure, six weeks ago. I impute the precious amendment to more submission to restraint in his diet, and to more care in avoiding the inclement gales. It encourages me to make this kindly solicited visit, in despite of the rigours of the season, and its landscape devastation,—

"Dim winter's naked hedge, and plashy field."

I go where it is well understood how to cheer the sullen day.

— — — — — —

I am gratified by your praise of my translation of the two odes of Horace*. You seem to prefer the ode addressed to Melpomene. My favourite is that which recommends a frugal sacrifice; it appears to me more pleasing, though perhaps less sublime.

Scarce an hour has past since Mr Saville brought me, with all the triumph of poetic taste in his eyes, what he justly called an high treat,

* They will be found in the author's Poetic Miscellany, together with many other translations or paraphrases from the Horatian lyrics.

fresh imported from Asian bowers. "I have tasted," said he, "just sipt, and found its flavour delicious; if you are not charmed with the opening of this new poem, the Task, I shall resign my pretences to know what will please you." He began with those harmonious tones, that spirit, that variety of cadence, which makes poetry poetry indeed,—

> "I sing the sofa—I who lately sung
> Faith, hope, and charity, and touch'd with awe
> The solemn chords of that adventurous song,
> Now seek repose upon an humbler theme."

We had only time for the gay exordium, which traces the progress of chairs from the rude invention of the three-footed-stool, which received the royal weight of the immortal Alfred, to the luxurious sofa of the present day.

On my life this seems a spirited bard; his description paints admirably; it makes me see, with my mind's eye, the old-fashioned worked chairs, which, in former days, I have observed in Gothic mansions; observed them with a smile which expressed the contempt inspired by the refinement of modern days, and the progress of the arts. Exactly does the author bring back those venerable chairs, with their disproportioned imitations and faded gaudiness:

——" Their peony spread wide;
Their full blown rose; their shepherd and his lass:
Lap-dog and lambkin, with black staring eyes,
And parrots, with twin-cherries in their beak."

Few are the employments which, without being absolutely indispensable, could have drawn me from a poem of such lively exordium; yet it would be strange if writing to Mr Hayley had not been one of those few.

With Mr Saville's I join my acknowledgments for your goodness to his Elizabeth, and for the warm interest you take in her welfare. She meets with kind encouragement at the Bath concerts this winter from the company, and every indulgent attention from her amiable preceptor, Mr Rauzzini. The letters she has written to her father on these occasions, are master-pieces of simple pathos. A warm and guileless heart, softened by much timid sensibility, has, on having been called, by unforeseen circumstances, into public exertions, for which she had not been educated, given unconscious oratory to an artless pen. I am tempted to transcribe the letter which describes her first vocal attempt in the Bath concert-room.

" Yes it is over—the trying evening is over; and more happily than I could hope, or expect. I am all gratitude to my audience for their in-

dulgence. O! my dearest father, did I once think the time could ever come when I should dare to stand up with the presumption of attempting to entertain three hundred strangers with my poor voice? with so little science to guide me, and with small reliance, except on my ear, to protect me from absurd and ridiculous errors? I felt, strongly felt, how fearful a thing it was to see such a multitude of eyes fixed upon me, without hearing any other sound but that of my own voice; no dear father at my side to cheer the spirits of his trembling child;—to whisper the useful direction, and the encouraging bravo! O! my father, nothing but the thoughts that, since God has given me a talent, which, should I have the misfortune to lose you, would assist me in the support of my helpless infants, it would be criminal not to try to improve and exert it,—nothing else could have given me courage to open my mouth. When the piece of music played which was to introduce my song, how fervent was my prayer to God, that he would give me strength and resolution, for your sake and my childrens', to go through my effort without incurring disgrace! Dear father, I do think my prayers were heard. I felt strengthened and sustained when I stood up to sing. *You* and my little ones, all that are to dear to me in the world, seemed to stand before

me and encourage my attempt. My hand, indeed, trembled so, that Miss Cantelo kindly rose and helped me to hold my song; but my voice did not faulter *very much*.

"I was complimented, on my first rising, with a loud plaudit. *That* was a plaudit of encouragement; but I had the delight of being interrupted twice in the progress of my song with a repetition of this generous applause. *That* was the applause of mercy; since, though, considering every thing, I performed better than I myself expected, yet most well do I know that I could not deserve those indulgent testimonies of satisfaction from my audience. They were twice repeated on the close of my strain; and when the concert was over, several elegant ladies, whose names I do not know, came and spoke to me with so much kindness in their eyes! God bless them for it! it was a warm cordial to my beating heart."

Thus does our unpractised orator paint, in the vivid colours of truth and nature, all the feelings of her heart, and place every little interesting circumstance before our eyes that occurs each night of her performance. It is delightful to us who are warmly interested for her. Perhaps there are not many instances, like this, where a person commences public singer through considerations of genuine piety. Mr Newton of Lichfield has

been a liberal friend to this interesting young woman, and, at different times, made her a present of two very elegant dresses. She has been much noticed, and made herself many friends at Bath. Mrs Falconer, of this place, good-naturedly sent her father a billet the other day, to the following purport:

"I lately heard a lady in this neighbourhood read a letter from one of her correspondents at Bath. It had this paragraph. 'Our concerts are very good this winter. We have a Mrs Smith who pleases extremely."

The expression, "*a* Mrs Smith," is more gratifying than if it had been Mrs Smith from Lichfield; proving that the observation was made without an idea that the person to whom it was addressed, might, being of Staffordshire, be interested in Elizabeth's success.

I do not apologize to you, my dear bard, for the prolixity of these circumstances. Friendship finds nothing trivial which relates to its object; and you are not less alive than myself to the welfare of the sweet Syren whose virtues have engaged your esteem, whose melting songs have "wrapt your spirit in Elysium."

LETTER XXII.

To Mrs Mompessan*.

Wellsburn, near Warwick, Dec. 31, 1785.

Behold, dear Mrs Mompessan, the promised minutes of that curious conversation which once passed at Mr Dilly's, the bookseller, in a literary party, formed by Dr Johnson, Mr Boswell, Dr Mayo, and others, whom Mrs Knowles and myself had been invited to meet, and in which Dr Johnson and that lady disputed so earnestly. It is, however, previously necessary that you should know the history of the very amiable young woman who was the subject of their debate.

Miss Jenny Harry that was, for she afterwards married, and died ere the first nuptial year expired, was the daughter of a rich planter in the East Indies. He sent her over to England to receive her education, in the house of his friend, Mr Spry, where Mrs Knowles, the celebrated quaker,

* Miss Seward's most intimate and most deservedly valued friend. She died unmarried at Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire, in 1802, far advanced in years.

was frequently a visitor. Mr Spry affected wit, and was perpetually rallying Mrs Knowles on the subject of her quakerism, in the presence of this young, gentle and ingenuous girl; who, at the age of eighteen, had received what is called a proper education, one of modern accomplishments, without having been much instructed in the nature and grounds of her religious belief. Upon these visits Mrs Knowles was often led into a serious defence of quaker-principles. She speaks with clear and graceful eloquence on every subject. Her antagonists were shallow theologists, and opposed only idle and pointless raillery to deep and long-studied reasoning on the precepts of Scripture, uttered in persuasive accents, and clothed with all the beauty of language. Without any *design* of making a proselyte she gained one.

Miss Harry grew pensively serious, and meditated perpetually on all which had dropt from the lips of Mrs Knowles on a theme, the infinite importance of which she then, perhaps, first began to feel. At length, her imagination pursuing this its primal religious bias, she believed quakerism the only true Christianity. Beneath such conviction, she thought it her duty to join, at every hazard of worldly interest, that class of worshippers. On declaring these sentiments, several ingenious clergymen were commissioned to reason

with her; but we all know the force of first impressions in theology. This young lady was argued with by the divines, and threatened by her guardian, in vain. She persisted in resigning her splendid expectations for what appeared to her the path of duty.

Her father, on being made acquainted with her changed faith, informed her that she might choose between an hundred thousand pounds and his favour, or two thousand pounds and his renunciation, as she continued a churchwoman or commenced a quaker.

Miss Harry lamented her father's displeasure, but thanked him for the pecuniary alternative, assuring him that it included all her wishes as to fortune.

Soon after she left her guardian's house, and boarded in that of Mrs Knowles; to her she often observed, that Dr Johnson's displeasure, whom she had seen frequently at her guardian's, and who had always appeared fond of her, was amongst the greatest mortifications of her then situation. Once she came home in tears, and told her friend she had met Dr Johnson in the street, and had ventured to ask him how he did; but that he would not deign to answer her, and walked scornfully on. She added, " you are to meet him soon at Mr Dilly's—plead for me."

Thus far as prefatory to those requested minutes, which I made at the time of the ensuing conversation. It commenced with Mrs Knowles saying,—"I am to ask thy indulgence, Doctor, towards a gentle female to whom thou usedst to be kind, and who is uneasy in the loss of that kindness. Jenny Harry weeps at the consciousness that thou wilt not speak to her."

"Madam, I hate the odious wench, and desire you will not talk to me about her."

"Yet what is her crime, Doctor?"—"Apostacy, Madam; apostacy from the community in which she was educated."

"Surely the quitting one community for another cannot be a crime, if it is done from motives of conscience. Hadst thou been educated in the Romish church, I must suppose thou wouldst have abjured its errors, and that there would have been merit in the abjuration."

"Madam, if I had been educated in the Roman Catholic faith, I believe I should have questioned my right to quit the religion of my fathers; therefore, well may I hate the arrogance of a young wench, who sets herself up for a judge on theological points, and deserts the religion in whose bosom she was nurtured."

"She has not done so; the name and the faith of Christians are not denied to the sectaries."

"If the name is not, the common sense is."

"I will not dispute this point with thee, Doctor, at least at present, it would carry us too far. Suppose it granted, that, in the mind of a young girl, the weaker arguments appeared the strongest, her want of better judgment should excite thy pity, not thy resentment."

"Madam, it has my anger and my contempt, and always will have them."

"Consider, Doctor, she must be *sincere*.—Consider what a noble fortune she has sacrificed."

"Madam, Madam, I have never taught myself to consider that the association of folly can extenuate guilt."

"Ah! Doctor, we cannot rationally suppose that the Deity will not pardon a defect in judgment (supposing it should prove one) in that breast where the consideration of serving him, according to its idea, in spirit and truth, has been a preferable inducement to that of worldly interest."

"Madam, I pretend not to set bounds to the mercy of the Deity; but I hate the wench, and shall ever hate her. I hate all impudence; but the impudence of a chit's apostacy I *nauseate*."

"Jenny is a very gentle creature.—She trembles to have offended her parent, though far removed from his presence; she grieves to have offended her guardian, and she is sorry to have of-

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fended Dr Johnson, whom she loved, admired, and honoured."

"Why, then, Madam, did she not consult the man whom she pretends to have loved, admired, and honoured, upon her newfangled scruples? If she had looked up to that man with any degree of the respect she professes, she would have supposed his ability to judge of fit and right, at least equal to that of a raw wench just out of her primmer."

"Ah! Doctor, remember it was not from amongst the witty and the learned that Christ selected his disciples, and constituted the teachers of his precepts. Jenny thinks Dr Johnson great and good; but she also thinks the gospel demands and enjoins a simpler form of worship than that of the established church; and that it is not in wit and eloquence to supersede the force of what appears to her a plain and regular system, which cancels all typical and mysterious ceremonies, as fruitless and even idolatrous; and asks only obedience to its injunctions, and the ingenuous homage of a devout heart."

"The homage of a fool's-head, madam, you should say, if you will pester me about the ridiculous wench."

"If thou choosest to suppose her ridiculous, thou canst not deny that she has been religious, sin-

cere, disinterested. Canst thou believe that the gate of Heaven will be shut to the tender and pious mind, whose *first* consideration has been that of apprehended duty?"

"Pho, pho, Madam, who says it will?"

"Then if Heaven shuts not its gate, shall man shut his heart?—If the Deity accept the homage of such as sincerely serve him under every form of worship, Dr Johnson and this humble girl will, it is to be hoped, meet in a blessed eternity, whither human animosity must *not* be carried."

"Madam, I am not fond of meeting fools anywhere; they are detestable company, and while it is in my power to avoid conversing with them, I certainly shall exert that power; and so you may tell the odious wench, whom you have persuaded to think herself a saint, and of whom you will, I suppose, make a preacher; but I shall take care she does not preach to *me*."

The loud and angry tone in which he thundered out these replies to his calm and able antagonist, frightened us all, except Mrs Knowles, who gently, not sarcastically, smiled at his injustice. Mr Boswell whispered me, "I never saw this mighty lion so chafed before."

I have withdrawn myself from a very interesting circle to transcribe for you these extracts. Its social temptations allured me, some five days

past, from the side of my aged nurseling, whom I so seldom leave, to the now frozen banks of Warwickshire's immortal stream, which, for the palm of poetic glory, vies, nay more than vies, with that of the Meles and the Mincio. Now, if you were a fellow of a college, you would probably most unpatriotically question at least the transcendency of the claim; but that is the scepticism of pedantry. I have observed that learning, freed from her spells by the power of genuine taste and sensibility, always allows it. I am afraid you do not love poetry enough to interest yourself in the question. Mrs Mompessan is the only instance I have ever met, where a strong understanding, a fine imagination, and a feeling heart, have not been poignantly alive to its charms. *You*, of all people, you to be this provoking *unique*, who, in history, chronology, memoir, and moral philosophy, are an absolute walking library! In the ordinarily furnished bosom, I expect to find a torpedo of this sort—but in yours!—I am certainly very sweet-tempered not to lose my patience. Adieu!

LETTER XXIII.

To Mrs Knowles.

Coleshill, eight o'clock, Jan. 19, 1780.

I INTENDED long since to have acknowledged your last welcome letter, rich in the treasures of wit, and exhaustless fancy; but our purposes,

> "Th' inaudible and pauseless foot of time
> Steals, ere we can effect them."

I am returning home to my poor father, after an absence of three weeks, which I meant should have been only one. The good accounts I received of his precious, though feeble health, made me unable to resist the persuasions of the charming family I have left, to prolong my stay on the frozen banks of the Avon till this inauspicious morning, which slowly broke through the sleet and snows that have covered my chaise in a dreary journey; and here have I been waiting some hours for the arrival of post-horses, to convey me to the dear paternal arms.

At Buxton, August twelvemonth, I became acquainted with Mrs Granville of Calwich, once

Harriet Delebere, the favourite friend of your heroic Jenny Harry, and worthy to have been so, for her mind is amiable, as her person is lovely; with her husband, a sensible and excellent man, who, for a large estate, has lately resigned the name of his fathers; and with his brother, Mr Dewes of Wellsburn, near Warwick, in whose house I have passed the last three weeks. This gentleman is a little thin valetudinarian bachelor, with the complexion and air of a Frenchman; polite, learned, intelligent, sincere, and pious. He has travelled, and been much in various and polished societies. I was invited to his villa, the abode of belles-lettres and the arts, to meet Mr and Mrs Granville, and his second brother, Mr B. Dewes, with their respective children. Mr B. Dewes has lost his lady. Christmas entertainments with the surrounding families; a regular morning concert, during two hours, between the three brothers, all musical, and performing on different instruments, with their friend, Mr Williams, the clergyman of the village, who plays a fine bass-viol; reading aloud from the poetic stores the remainder of the mornings, and in those evenings when we had no visitors; speeded the wintry hours of the day and night on smooth and rapid pinion. I took with me Cowper's Task, the first very distinguished fire of a star lately

arisen in our poetic hemisphere, and the Essay on Epic Poetry by the Bard of Eartham. To the former, they attended with much admiration; to the latter, though not new to them, they listened with new delight. More of Wellsburn hereafter, for the horses are come. I shall take four to drag me through the deep snows. It will be midnight ere I reach home. O! that I may find my father well; and, in the return of his Nancy, I am sure to find him happy.

Lichfield, January the 25th.

Though in his bed, my dear father, watching for me, heard the hall-door open on Monday midnight, and rang his bell. Hastening to him, I heard him say, as I entered his apartment,—"Is it my Nancy, my dear Nancy?" Our meeting was glad, even to rapture, on both sides; perceiving, as I did, full as much appearance of internal health as on our separation. Several of our kind neighbours had promised me that he should not pass many lonely hours in my absence. My cousin, Mr White, and Giovanni, were, by turns, almost constantly with him.

At Wellsburn, Mrs Granville and myself often talked of the dear saint, your Jenny Harry. I read to the animated party the whole of your charming letter. They were much impressed by

the pathos with which it describes that soft resignation, which, dying in the bloom of her life, drew the sting of death from her bosom; and by those angelic aspirations, that lighted, with more than a sun, the chambers of the opening grave. My friends listened, with an air of tender and pious delight, to a description which chased away all sorrow for a loss, so much *her* gain. It augmented the esteem with which they had always viewed the noble sacrifice she made to apprehended duty, of an interest so dazzling.

The gayer parts of your epistle enchanted them by their brilliance. The ingenious comparison of this late intoxicated, and now sick and disordered kingdom, to a tavern company, after a drunken riot, highly pleased the somewhat fastidious taste of my ingenious host. He called your manner of writing vivid, strong, and original. We do not *always* agree in our opinion of talents and composition. He often thinks my approbation too glowing, I his too coy; but we are perfectly in unison concerning the strength and fertility of imagination in your letters, and in the poems of Hayley. Mr Dewes agreed with me, that these poems equal Dryden's, as to the luxuriance of poetic creation, and the happiness of allusion, avoiding the slovenly coarseness of his style.

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Johnson's daughter-in-law, dear Lucy Porter, was buried this evening. The little asperities of her petulant humour had all softened down in her long illness, sustained with true Christian patience. Thus we saw her passing slowly away from us, and saw it with considerable regret; but *she* had no regret; none of those yearnings after protracted existence; none of those terrors at approaching dissolution, which hung about the sternly-fading form of her mighty father-in-law.

I cannot quit this funeral theme, without observing to you, how I was shocked to read of poor Beardmere's death; so full of health, bloom, and prosperity, as I lately saw him, and in the strength and vigour of his life; but nature deals much in this "cunning flattery."

Your old acquaintance, Kitty ———, who married a Warwickshire squire, lives very near Mr Dewes, and squiresses it with much loquacious importance; but away with every thing like sarcastic comment upon a prudent wife, a kind mother, and a cheerful desirable neighbour. Ah! how much a more useful creature than such a *celibaic* cypher as myself! You coin a word now and then, so pray welcome my strangor-epithet. Her sons are fine youths; and her eldest daughter is "the fairest flower of the vicinage."

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Surely you are too hard upon the military profession, by denying all compatibility between the life of a soldier and the faith of a Christian. Texts may be found in Scripture, which authorise their union; and as the general voice of mankind so loudly applauds the darings of human butchery, a good man may certainly, without being a deist, persuade himself, that he is doing his duty, when he defends his king and country, at the hazard of his own life, and at that of shedding the life-blood of their foes. How finely has the old Colossus, whose writings I love even more than I dislike his disposition,—how finely has he described the force of military allurements!

> "The festal blazes, the triumphal shew,
> The ravish'd standard, and the captive foe;
> The Senate's thanks, the Gazette's pompous tale,
> With force resistless o'er the brave prevail.
> Such bribes the rapid Greek o'er Asia whirl'd,
> For this the steady Roman shook the world;
> For such, in distant lands, the Britons shine,
> And stain with blood the Danube and the Rhine.
> Yet reason frowns on war's unequal game,
> Where wasted nations raise a single name,
> And mortgag'd lands their grandsires wreaths regret,
> From age to age in everlasting debt;
> Wreaths, which at last the dear-bought right convey
> To rust on medals, or on stones decay."

You and I, however, shall close our dispute in perfect unison, equally deprecating the horrors of

war; detesting it on all less than necessary occasions, and lamenting the delusive fires of false glory, that gild the fatal conflicts, of restless ambition.

Mrs Granville shewed me Jenny Harry's apologetic tract on quitting our church in favour of quakerism, at so vast a sacrifice of worldly interest. We all agreed, for it was read aloud in the Wellsburn circle, that this tract evinced depth of thought, and powers of reasoning, that, in a girl of twenty, were very extraordinary. It occasioned us to comment, with fresh indignation, upon the ruffian-asperity of Dr Johnson on this subject; for I had previously recounted to them the conversation of that tremendous evening, as Mr Boswell calls it, at Dilly's, when you, with patient and placid smiles, calmly and concisely refuted the roarings of bigot rage, which induced his shuddering friend's emphatic whisper—"I never saw this mighty lion so chafed before."

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Thank you for your charming portraits of Mrs Lort and Mrs Hunter; one the child of wit, the other of imagination. Yours is the simile of similies, for those coldly-prudent hearts so differently constructed from that of the fair enthusiast Mrs H.! "Pagods that sit squat, demure, and alone, in separate niches." I am honoured by the

predilection of those charming women in my favour.

As to a miscellany of mine, there is certainly sufficient materials in my desk to fill several volumes, without marginal lakes spread out between the passages; but they must be arranged, corrected, and transcribed, ere they can approach the press; and I almost despair of ever finding leisure for the task. How dear Mr Hayley, with those burning eyes of his, which, "though clear, to outward sight, of blemish or of spot," annoy him so much by the sense of internal inflammation, how he gets through those numerous beautiful productions which he presents to the public, I cannot imagine; but, indeed, he lives in hermitic retirement, and I in the mill-horse round of a provincial city's diurnal society.

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I meant to have spoken to you farther of the spirited graces of Cowper's Task; but in a letter, already voluminous, I must not give my ideas their full license on the subject. The sublime, though gloomy, fires of Young, with the corrosive ones of Churchill, stream blended through its later pages. The author seems almost as religious as the former, and quite as ill-natured as the latter. Shield me from saints who look upon the world as a den of fools and knaves! I

repine when such possess a muse of fire, with whom dwell the creative powers of imagery, the soft bright hues of description, and the melting influence of pathos. The beautiful apostrophe to Omaia, together with many other parts of this poem, breathes of all these inspirations.

What an interesting object is your Mary Lloyd in her rural habiliments, with all her serene emanations streaming around her!

And O! what a truly comic scene is formed by your description of Mrs ——— in her fine coach, and yourself standing upon your own steps, and hammering out excuses for not having returned her visits! That ever wit and humour should have enabled you to present yourself so exactly to my ideas in the form of a turkey-poot, casting about, with a pitiful poked-out neck, for its lost companion. How was I diverted by the fine lady's fine lamentation, in her fine coach, for the loss of your society, which is to her just such a loss as our late friend, the blind philosopher, would sustain on the removal of a Claud-landscape from his apartment! When I came to the Turkey-poot passage, I exclaimed, with Lady Grace, "O! I see them, I see them!" You always stoop, and poke out your pretty long neck, when you are non-plussed.

My curiosity is on fire to become acquainted with my sisters, the old maids, of whom I hear so much, and which are said to be the bard's. My bookseller, neglecting my order, has vexed me by delay. What an age of wit and genius is the present! But the world will never be cured of its cant about "weakened nature and exhausted art." Shaftesbury and Addison so canted in *their* period, now called the Augustan: Envy of contemporary claims produces, and will ever produce it. We have plenty of ravens, that fly croaking about, and seek to darken, with their flapping wings, the present golden day.—Farewell!

LETTER XXIV.

COURT DEWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, Jan. 30, 1786.

COLD and dreary was my journey from the mansion of many pleasures at Wellsburn, through the snowy length of unjoyous roads: but however destitute of bodily comforts, filial hopes, the delight which I knew my return would diffuse through the dear aged bosom, recompensed the

chillness and monotony of outward objects. The happiness my father expressed on my return, made it impossible for me to regret the loss of any gratifications which he had not shared. It is not to you that I scruple to acknowledge this, amidst my grateful thanks for your late attentions, as well as animated welcome. They have left me largely your debtor.

All the politeness of your spirit is in the reason you give for the decreasing interest of the Task, the two first books of which I had the honour to read to you. But, in truth, the interest of that poem does decrease on its progress. It is ill for the interest of a muse, at least with people of benevolent taste, when she quits the mazes of sportive invention, pathetic description, and generous sentiment, for those thorny paths of acrimonious satire, whose darkness is rendered visible by the flashes of the reader's just indignation.

As to the Old Maids, I still rely upon internal evidence respecting the author of that work. Perhaps I wish no man had written it, while I feel that no woman would; but I persevere in believing there is but one man in Europe, since it lost Voltaire, whose species of wit is responsible for that very uncommon composition.

Apropos of old maids.—After a gradual decline of a few months, we have lost dear Mrs Porter, the earliest object of Dr Johnson's love. This was some years before he married her mother. In youth, her fair, clean complexion, bloom, and rustic prettiness, pleased the men. More than once she might have married advantageously; but as to the enamoured affections,

> "High Taurus' snow, fann'd by the eastern wind,
> Was not more cold."

Spite of the accustomed petulance of her temper, and odd perverseness, since she had no malignance, I regret her as a friendly creature, of intrinsic worth, with whom, from childhood, I had been intimate. She was one of those few beings who, from a sturdy singularity of temper, and some prominent good qualities of head and heart, was enabled, even in her days of scanty maintenance, to make society glad to receive, and pet the grown spoiled child. Affluence was not hers till it came to her in her fortieth year, by the death of her eldest brother. From the age of twenty till that period, she had boarded in Lichfield with Dr Johnson's mother, who still kept that little bookseller's shop, by which her husband had supplied the scanty means of existence.

Meantime, Lucy Porter kept the best company of our little city, but would make no engagement on market-days, lest Granny, as she called Mrs Johnson, should catch cold by serving in the shop. There Lucy Porter took her place, standing behind the counter, nor thought it a disgrace to thank a poor person who purchased from her a penny battledore.

With a marked vulgarity of address and language, and but little intellectual cultivation, she had a certain shrewdness of understanding, and piquant humour, with the most perfect truth and integrity. By these good traits in her character, were the most respectable inhabitants of this place induced to bear, with kind smiles, her mulish obstinacy, and perverse contradictions. Johnson himself, often her guest, set the example, and extended to her that compliant indulgence which he shewed not to any other person. I have heard her scold him like a school-boy, for soiling her floor with his shoes, for she was clean as a Dutchwoman in her house, and exactly neat in her person. Dress too she loved in her odd way; but we will not assert that the Graces were her handmaids. Friendly, cordial, and cheerful to those she loved, she was more esteemed, more amusing, and more regretted, than many a polished character, over whose smooth, but insipid surface, the

attention of those who have *mind* passes listless and uninterested.

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Adieu!—Do I flatter myself inordinately by the idea, that I am sometimes regretted in that circle at Wellsburn, which so well understands how to speed and illuminate the winter's day?

LETTER XXV.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY, on the Continent.

Lichfield, Feb. 1, 1786.

OFTEN has it been mine to experience that unpleasant sensation of stagnated abilities, under the influence of which you began your letter; but imagination soon gets afloat upon the rising energies of friendly communication. I smiled to see how quickly yours began to glide away through the pages before me, with every sail of the imagination unfurled; yet it grieved me to see the sable flag waving amongst them. Alas! poor L——!—Surely the once gay and frolic Estrena will feel some kind regrets, some upbraidings of conscience, when she hears of his death, a con-

siderable period of whose existence her capricious desertion had embittered.

I am charmed with your description of Aix, and its emerald avenues—with your picture of the gloomy and infested passage between the cleft rocks on the road to Marseilles, in which the gentle Mrs Whalley was an armed heroine; and with the town itself, that splendid and filthy city, that "stands and stinks in state," and whose opera-singers must, to a blind person, suggest the idea of holding their noses while they warble.

I long to wander in the orange-groves of Heiles. Whence comes it, that poetry has not celebrated this Gallic Arcadia? How infinitely more lovely is France in her vegetable than in her *human* productions? The first perfume the air with their balmy gales and delicious odours, while the latter pollute it with the most odious degree of uncleanliness. The want of taste and solicitude for external purity always destroys my confidence in the internal worth.

Having never seen a large town on the margin of the extended ocean, I had annexed an idea of loneliness to the sea-shore. You describe an extent of coast, many miles in length, populous and busy as the banks of the Thames, and make me see

White Cocolleto gleaming on the strand,
And steep Saint Remo running up the rocks,
As eager to approach, with pious haste,
The dome maternal, that majestic sits
Calm on the heights before her olive cone.

And is it no more than thus with the descendants of the great Columbus? Ah! since they *must* labour for their daily bread, I hope they are unconscious of their illustrious origin, lest reflection, on a degeneracy so cruel, should make the sweat of their brows corrosive to their peace!

But Genoa, the magnificent city!—which seems to possess a right to that boast, which the enamoured Andre thought could belong *only* to little Lichfield, even to that celebrated exclamation which the Prophet makes for Babylon, "I *am*, and there is *none* beside me."

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The image in your nocturnal navigation is truly poetic—the moon dropping her brilliants in the sea, and edging its curling waves with silver; —but O! how have you muddied the poetically crystal Arno, by dashing the torch of *truth* into its waters!

A new star is arisen in our poetic hemisphere, with very powerful lustre; yet I by no means

* Towns on the Italian coast.

think its generally red and angry beams very auspicious to human happiness, or to human virtue. The name of this luminary is Cowper; his work, entitled The Task, has many and great poetic beauties, both as to imagery, landscape, and sentiment; yet the author perpetually shews himself to be a sarcastic misanthropist. It opens, however, with a gay and enchanting genealogy of seats, from the three-legged stool of Alfred to the accomplished sofa of George the Third; but this delicious gaiety of spirit soon shuts in. Do you remember these lines in an old Scotch ballad, called The Flowers of the Forest?

> "I have seen Tweed streaming
> With sun-beams bright gleaming,
> Grow *drumly* and black as he rolls on his way."

So it is with the muse of Cowper.

But Bristol seems the soil where poetic plants, of wonderful strength and luxuriance, spring up amidst the weeds and brambles of vulgar life. The milk-woman's celebrity must have reached you across the seas. She is said to have behaved most ungratefully to her humane and energetic patroness, Miss H. More. Inflexible moral honesty, stern uncomplaining patience, that silently endured the bitterest evils of want, are re-

corded by the pen of that celebrated lady, in the anecdotes she formerly gave us of this muse-born wonder. Her writings breathe a gloomy and jealous dignity of spirit. Great delicacy was required in the manner of conferring obligation on a mind so tempered. Miss More's letter to Mrs Montague, prefixed to Lactilla's first publication, struck me with an air of superciliousness towards the Being she patronized; and the pride of genius in adversity revolted. So, in a similar situation, would surly Samuel Johnson have spurned the hand that, after it had procured him the bounty of others, sought to dictate to him as to its use; and that resentment, which, in *her*, is universally execrated, would, coming down to us now as a record of *his* emerging talents, have been generally excused, and probably, with whatever little reason, admired. I should not wonder if this sudden reverse of public esteem should send this kindred spirit of the unfortunate Chatterton's to attend his manes in the dreary path of suicide.

From a blind alley of the same distinguished city, a third * illiterate genius has started up, with powers little inferior to Lactilla's. He sets his compositions to pleasing, though wild, airs of his own. The world, however, refuses to celebrate and protect him, as it did her; shelt'ering its con-

* Bryant, the maker of tobacco-pip.

tempt under declamations upon the ingratitude of the milk-woman.

Critics are also started up, producing books abounding with the spawn of Johnsonian envy, unsupported with Johnsonian ability, and unadorned with Johnsonian wit.

The sweet syren, Mrs Smith, is at Bath, and very kindly received. She writes us extremely pretty and pathetic letters. We learn from them, that matrimony has not extinguished Mrs Velley's enthusiasm about *your* talents and virtues. I draw a pleasing prognostic for that lady's future happiness, from her having, with her own hands, dressed Mrs Smith for her first essay in the concert-room. It shews that Major Velley throws no damp of disapprobation upon her active and affable benevolence, from the strutting jealousy of false dignity. Sophia kindly regrets your and Mrs W.'s absence from Bath on Mrs Smith's account, conscious as she is, how warmly you would have patronized that pleasing young woman!

The drowsy hour has stolen upon me—my eyes are heavy—so is my heart, at times, when I think of friends whom I might search for in vain over this island, of no narrow bounds.

LETTER XXVI.

H. Repton, Esq.

Lichfield, Feb. 23, 1786.

It was with the true English sullenness that your spirit felt repressed and deadened beneath the consciousness of having, by procuring a frank, laid yourself under the necessity of writing to me on a certain day. From the style of your first page, I perceive you fancied your talents in cramping-irons, and that they must necessarily plod through the white waste of blank paper, with a dull and heavy pace; and I smile to observe how soon you found these same ideal cramping-irons were, in reality, a pair of light skates, on which imagination glided rapidly away, with every free and graceful exertion; since the very next passage to that which complains of the retarding power of that restraint, is highly beautiful and ingenious. It is on the subject of the celebrated ————, expressing your doubts whether

* A gentleman well known by his skill in landscape gardening, and not less distinguished by private worth and polished manners.

a visit from you would prove welcome, because you had not made one before her benefit; observing, that "the little you have to bestow must be confined to merit in distress; that it is only for the greatly affluent to reward Genius in affluence; since, though a watering-pot may refresh a bed of drooping flowers, nothing less than the liberal showers of the wide horizon can nourish the woods and lawns, or ripen to perfection the abundant harvest." No metaphor can be more complete than that,—no allusion more happy.

By reflecting back upon your recollection this admirable sentence, I justify myself against your charge of partial praise on the theme of your epistolary talents; like the lover who, when his mistress tells him he flatters her, leads the nymph to the looking-glass.

My pen, let me tell you, never troubles itself to manufacture unmeaning compliments, and scorns the task of disingenuous flattery—but, as I love commendation myself, where my heart tells me I deserve it, and where I have any confidence in the judgment of the *commender*, so I also love to indulge my spirit in the luxury of encomium where I can honestly bestow it. That I have an eye quick to discern the emanations of genius, and of just and generous sentiments; and a mind which delights to contemplate their graces, and to ap-

plaud their cultivation, is at least my happiness, if it is not allowed to be my praise. Your making these propensities of mine an insuperable bar to a communication of my letters to any of your friends, is surely a needless scruple. If this is *not* false modesty, the frank permission I often give my companions of perusing ingenious letters addressed to myself, though sprinkled over with the hyperboles of partiality, must strike them as a proof of vanity. But, in truth, if the readers of such letters see clearer on the subject of my talents and disposition than the writers, I conclude they observe, with Stella, on her being shewn Swift's beautiful poem, Cadenus and Vanessa, that "a man of genius may write finely on a broom-stick."

However, your reserve about my letters is, perhaps, in my favour, though the sensibility which produces it may be superfluous, since my letters, like my verses, are not much calculated to please the popular taste.

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I admit, in a great degree, the justice of all you say on the subject of my paraphrastic odes from Horace. If I had ever entertained the idea of translating or paraphrasing the lyric compositions of that very agreeable poet regularly, I should have probably renounced it after having read your

last letter; but I had no such intention; yet, as I find it very amusing to give an English dress to a few of the most beautiful, while my hair is dressing, and as the attempt has greatly pleased some of my learned friends—since they flatter me with having caught the *spirit*, while I departed from the *letter* of the poet, I have ventured to send one for every month since this year commenced, to the Gentleman's Magazine, and perhaps may continue that tribute till it expires.

Mr Hayley calls these same little odes of mine beautiful. His partial regard for me may render his praise too vivid for their merit; but that praise cannot be bestowed, with any degree of truth, upon the entire translations of the Horace-odes which the scholars have given. That it cannot, affords proof to me that they will not bear a literal or even close translation, without losing their fire and their grace.

If I have rendered a few of them interesting to even but one genuine disciple of the muses, my trifling, for I cannot call it labour, has not been in vain. Over the lyre of Horace I throw an unfettered, perhaps a presumptuous, hand.

That you have not read the Clarissa does not much excite my wonder. I know the aversion which most sensible people have to novels; and those who, like you, live much in the world, are

deterred by the idea of eight volumes closely written. It is but of late years that this work has been considered as amongst the English classics. I thank you for promising to read it with attention. Nothing is more agreeable to me than the consciousness of having opened new sources of rational delight to those whom I esteem.

You tell me that Mrs Repton reads to you in an evening while you draw. I envy you the Julian faculty of dividing your attention without breaking it into useless fragments.

If it was early instead of late in my large sheet, I should speak to you of the publications which have attracted attention since I wrote to you last. Mr Boswell's entertaining Tour with the growling philosopher, over the desert Hebrides, which, through the fidelity of the describer, enables us to discern most distinctly the colloquial brightness of that luminary, and also its dark and turbid spots;—Those pharisaic meditations, with their popish prayers for old Tetty's soul; their contrite parade about lying in bed on a morning; drinking creamed tea on a fast-day; snoring at sermons, and having omitted to ponder well Bel and the Dragon, and Tobit and his Dog:—Cowper's Task, which the generous reader of poetic susceptibility at once censures and adores: O! that such a master of the metaphoric, the allusive,

the scenic, and the pathetic graces, should so often lay them aside to whip the follies of the age with an iron-rod, sometimes mistaking good for evil propensities, as when he satirizes the amiable warmth of encomium upon the talents it reveres! The Essay on Old Maids; certainly the production of that pen, whose genius, wit, and learning, throws most of its literary rivals at immeasurable distance. This whimsical work, richly illuminated by all those emanations, so lightly, so wantonly betrays the cause it affects to defend, that I could wish it had never passed the press. My heart rejoices that this severe winter has passed its gloomy zenith; trembling as I do for the effect of its keen blasts upon my aged nursling. Adieu.

LETTER XXVII.

JAMES BOSWELL, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 25, ——.

"No, Sir," there are not any lees—the spirit of your Tour with Johnson runs clear to the last

syllable. Those who are not interested in its anecdotes, can have little intellectual curiosity and no imagination. Those who are not entertained with the perpetual triumph of sarcastic wit over fair ingenuous argument, must be sturdier moralists than even Johnson himself affected to have been; and those who do not love the biographer, as they read, whatever imperfection they may find in the massive Being whom he so strongly characterizes, can have no hearts.

I confess, however, that it was not without some surprise that I perceived so much exultation avowed concerning the noble blood which flows in your veins; since it is more honourable for a man of distinguished ingenuity to have been obscurely than splendidly descended; because then his distinctions are more exclusively his *own*. Often, as well you are aware, have nobles, princes, perhaps kings, stood awed in the presence of the son of a Lichfield bookseller. Can the recorder of *his* life and actions think birth of consequence? Mr Boswell is too humble in fancying he can derive honour from noble ancestry. It is for the line of Bruce to be proud of the historian of Corsica—it is for the House of Auchinlec to boast of him who, with the most fervent personal attachment to an illustrious literary character, has yet been sufficiently faithful to the just claims of the

public upon biographic fidelity, to represent him, not as his weak or prejudiced idolaters might wish to behold him; not in the light in which *they* desire to contemplate Johnson, who pronounce his writings to be an obscure jargon of pompous pedantry, and his imputed virtues a superstitious farrago of pharisaic ostentation; but as he *was* the most wonderful composition of great and absurd, of misanthropy and benevolence, of luminous intellect and prejudiced darkness, that was ever produced in the human breast.

The only part of this work whose omission I could much have wished, is the passage which records the despot's injustice to Mrs Montague's ingenious and able Treatise on Shakespeare. Its omission, as all my correspondents observe, would have been much more consonant than its appearance to the philanthropy of the biographer.

I have, it is true, seen a great deal of nonsense about your Tour in the public prints, and that both in its praise and abuse. It is hard to say who are most absurd, they who vilify its entertaining effusions, as vapid and uninteresting, or they who fancy they see a perfect character in the stupendous mortal whom its pages exhibit in lights so striking and so various; bowing down before the relics of popish superstition; repay-

ing the hospitable kindness of the Scotch professors with unfeeling exultation over the barrenness of their country, and the imputed folly of their religion; and roaming, like a Greenland bear, over Caledonia and her lonely isles.

I have written to the elegant bard of Sussex, to Mr Whalley, who is on the Continent, to my late and ever-honoured friend, Dr John Jebb, and my other literary correspondents upon the merits of your Tour; and in a spirit of warm encomium upon the gay benevolence, characteristic traits, scenic graces, and biographic fidelity which adorn its pages; observing also how valuable a counterpart it forms to Dr Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides. In *one* we perceive, through a medium of solemn and sublime eloquence, in what light Scotland, her nobles, her professors, and her chieftains appeared to the august wanderer; in the *other* how the growling philosopher appeared to them. If the use of biography is to ascertain and discriminate character, its domestic minuteness is its most essential excellence.

The nearly universal approbation with which those whose opinions are of consequence, have mentioned your work to me, precludes all ideas of defence against the frothy spleen descending so continually upon ingenious composition from the

pen of anonymous criticism. It descends in plenteous effusion,

"But leaves no spot or blame behind."

LETTER XXVIII.

MISS SCOTT.

Lichfield, March 29, 1786.

CAN it be that three months of this dreary season have elapsed, without affording me an opportunity of expressing the satisfaction I feel from perceiving you likely to renounce the painful combat with long-established affection? Ah! if the delay of Mr Taylor's wishes were to terminate only with your mother's existence, who shall say when it may end? His lot is harder than that of Jacob toiling for his Rachael, if Hope has no distincter goal. Meantime life wears and wastes.

I ventured to pass the Christmas month at Wellsburn, in Warwickshire, beneath the hospitable and elegant mansion of my friend, Mr Dewes, a gentleman of many virtues, and many accomplishments.

They are of a nature to make one regret his celibacy. A younger brother of his changed the name of Dewes to that of Granville for a large fortune, left him by his uncle. I have heard, had Mr Granville chosen it, he might have obtained the Lansdown title, being descended from that family. His lovely lady, with a mind well cultivated, and adorned by every feminine virtue, has the most ingenuous and charming manners imaginable. She and her equally excellent husband, and another brother of Mr Dewes, with the respective children of each, formed our party.

These agreeable families reside in the village, and several in the neighbourhood, with whom we had much social intercourse. Our short day and long evening were divided with a regularity that husbanded the hours. They were, in turn, enlivened by music and poetry, by some agreeable evening card-parties, and by convivial sprightliness. Thus it was that we scarce heard the howling of those sleety storms that made the without scene so total a contrast to that within. The village of Wellsburn almost borders on the park of the Lucy family, from whence Shakespeare stole the deer. To the many other pleasures of that excursion, was added an ineffably pleasing sensation, the result of finding myself, for the first time of my life, in the Shakesperian region; in meet-

ing, on our visits, the waves of the Avon, though they were crusted over with ice.

No, dear Miss Scott, Johnson's mind was not originally perverted by applause; though, when his literary fame became established, the dread of his merciless wit infused into the feelings of his auditors a servility which fed the diseases of his nature, arrogance and envy; but they were inherent propensities, which "grew with his growth, and strengthened with his strength."

The rigid, nay the uncharitable orthodoxy of his avowed opinions, was the source of that flood of adulation which has been poured upon his tomb. He stood forth the vengeful champion of the established hierarchy. It became necessary to put upon his character the whole armour of virtue, to give weight to his applauses, and force to his anathemas. The clergy are a numerous class, and, in general, the most literary of all other classes. They seek to make Johnson a saint, after the same manner, and for similar reasons, that the monks canonized very frail kings, when Popery was in force amongst us.

Miss Reeves'* reply to my Stricture on her Richardsonian absurdity, is at once weak and artful. Her Treatise on Romances is, in every re-

* Gent. Mag. Feb. 1786.

spect, a work extremely below the level of those talents to which we believe ourselves indebted for the admirable English Baron. The former seems chiefly written to court the favour of our reviewers, whom it meanly invests with that justice and ability of decision to which their general strictures have so little pretension. How should they be *able*, and how are they likely to be *just*, composed, as the general class of them are, of hireling authors, whose own works have not merit, or celebrity to afford them a maintenance? Hence are they naturally the foes of their superior and more fortunate rivals. Miss Reeves, in her work on romances, exposes her ignorance in terming H. Cleveland an original, and the composition of an unknown writer; since it is well understood to be a translation from the celebrated Abbé Prévost.

We are this year threatened with as long a dreariness as banished from the last our genial hours of fresh prelusive sweetness; robbed our banks of their primroses and violets, and our fields and hills of their golden king-cups.

LETTER XXIX.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, March 28, 1786.

You seem surprised, dear Sophia, at my idea that there is the same sort of difference between Mr W.'s letters and those of a certain friend of yours, that exists in their mutual poetry. In characterising the talents of poetic writers, I always rate their claim by the merit of their best work. Such of their writings as have marked inferiority to that never occur to me on the estimate. In mentioning this difference, I thought solely of the interesting and beautiful Edwy and Edilda. Mr W. is there in verse what he is in prose; when his spirit takes the wings of the morning, and flies to those it loves, from distant regions of the earth, infused in all her tender dews, and arrayed in all her orient colours. But to drop the metaphor; that dear poem is surely the exact counterpart of his letters, often diffuse, and often heedless of elegance, in particular expressions, but always abounding with the most touching pathos, the most exalted sentiments, the

most glowing and picturesque descriptions; nervous at times, but not habitually nervous. He has now been silent longer than usual; and I begin to grow anxious for tidings of his and Mrs Whalley's welfare. Our avidity to hear from those we love, is always, in some degree, proportioned to the consciousness of their distance, especially when Imagination sets her hour-glass on the ocean's edge.

Mr Saville's spirits begin to recover the deep shock they received in the strange death of his unfortunate daughter.—His Elisabeth, whose life and manners form so amiable a contrast to that of her sister, is gone to Bath, to imbibe more of that honied elegance, which Mr Rauzzini infuses into her tones and manner of singing Italian.

Ah! Sophia, it will be in vain that you expect trust in friendship, against appearances, from her to whose devoted affection, of twenty years' duration, an ——— could be ungrateful. Friendship is a serious sentiment; and, however the imagination may be charmed, the heart sighs when it perceives its affectionate enthusiasms repaid only by the light flourishings of gallantry, and the sparkling explosion of wit. On perusing such gay, such short, such seldom epistles from the dear and ever-honoured bard, I exclaim, with Ophelia, "No more, but so!"—remembering

the frequency, the length, and the heart-warm style of our first correspondence. Little did I once think that those prized letters would prove

> " But violets in the youth of primy friendship,
> Forward, not permanent, tho' sweet not lasting,
> The perfume, and suppliance of a minute."

My opinion of the Recess, of its faults, and of its beauties, is congenial to your own; but I cannot think it possesses that strong hold on the heart, with which the pages of Werter so irresistibly seize it. I scarce wept at the Recess, full of studied misery as it is; while the so naturally mournful pages of Werter resist the indurating effect of repeated perusals, and drown me in exhaustless tears.

Mr Dewes, Mr Arch-Deacon Clive, Mr Grove, Dr Gregory, and several other of my literary friends, gratify me by the warmest praises of my paraphrases of some of the most beautiful of Horace's odes. It is on no occasion that I have been better satisfied with my muse, I must confess, than when, after having put an ode of Horace into English verse, I have examined the translation of it by Francis, Oldsworths, and Duccombe. I shall adopt some fine lines, which I have met with on Dr Johnson's imitations of Juvenal's Satires—not vainly to say what I *have* done, but what I have wished and aimed to do.

"Boldly my ardent spirit seeks t'infuse
The vigorous sense of the Horatian muse;
Wou'd shine with more than a reflected light,
And with a Roman's ardour think and write.
The Latian flower, transplanted by weak hands,
To bloom a while factitious heat demands;
Tho' glowing Horace a faint warmth supplies,
The sickly blossom in the hot-house dies.
But from more genial culture, art, and toil,
The root strikes deep, and owns a kindred soil;
Imbibes our sun thro' all its glowing veins,
And grows a native of Britannia's plains."

So the voluptuous, the refined, the gay, the dissipated votary of fashion and expence, Mr ——, after having lavished away a noble fortune, avows his resolve to renounce the world, to retire into the country, to keep no servant, and content himself with the mere necessaries of life. I hope there can, after all his imprudence, be no necessity for an extreme so violent—for a contrast so total; and if there should, I doubt his perseverance, and therefore said to him, with a smile of blended pity and affection,

——————"Wilt! thinkest thou,
That the bleak air, thy boist'rous chamberlain,
Will put thy shirt on warm?—Will those moss'd trees,
That have outliv'd the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip when thou point'st out?—Will the cold brook,
Candied with ice, candle thy morning taste
To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit?"

Yet, after all, the hardships of severest abstinence are less oppressive than the heart-sick anxiety of conscious debts, and the hourly dread of a prison. How can it be, that talents have been so given in vain, as that the silly love of ostentation should induce those who possess them to strew such wounding thorns upon their pillow? Heaven preserve all I love from the fatal indiscretion!

LETTER XXX.

COURT DAWES, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 30, 1786.

YOUR profile is extremely like. I could not have received a more acceptable present. Several have been taken of me, but none would I suffer to be preserved, because there was not one which had ascertaining resemblance. Men and women, whose shoulders are on the large scale, appear with ten-fold their real clumsiness in these

shadowy outlines. Slenderness is essential to admit their presenting a resemblance which shall not be caricature; and surely one's feelings revolt from a caricature likeness of a friend.

Thank you for General Burgoyne's comedy, and for Miss More's late sprightly poems*. I am, in general, sick of our modern comedies, excepting the irresistible Sheridan's; but, after his, *this* is one of the best I have seen. The Blandishes are a race that swarm in the noon-tide beams of high-life and wealth. Our little city has produced them; though, for the exercise of their noble talents, they are obliged to resort to the seats of the neighbouring lords, lordlings, &c. down to the next class of stateliness above their own. To these—"Inferiors, horrid!—Equals, what a curse!" I have never seen the portraits of this delectable set of cringers at such full dramatic length, nor in such just and vivid colours as in General Burgoyne's comedy. Miss Alscrip appears to me to say too many really good things, and her general language is too ingeniously allusive to harmonize naturally with her absurd and stupid credulity, when Lady Emily exhibits mock airs of fashion and delicacy.

* Florio, a Poetical Tale, and the Bas bleu, or Conversation.

Miss More's poems have spirit and genius—but contain an affected and pedantic display of knowledge and erudition, especially the Bas bleu. In the Florio we find many brilliant passages; many just and striking observations, and some admirable portraits in satiric traits. Not Hayley himself has drawn a modern beau better. Florio is the rival of Filligree, in the Triumphs of Temper, with sufficient difference to avert the charge of plagiarism from the female author;—but the versification in Florio is, at times, strangely inharmonious, often alliterating with the hardest consonants, and sometimes disgraced by vulgarism: instances,

"For face, no mortal cou'd resist her."

And,

"He felt not Celia's powers of face."

These *face*-expressions put me in mind of an awkward pedantic youth, once resident, for a little time, at Lichfield. He was asked how he liked Miss Honora Sneyd. "Almighty powers!" replied the oddity, "I could not have conceived that she had half the face she has!" Honora was finely rallied about this imputed plenitude of face.

The oval elegance of its delicate and beauteous contour, made the exclamation trebly absurd. How could Miss More so apply a phrase, always expressive of effrontery? and how could so *learned* a lady suffer the pleonasm of the following line to escape her pen?

"With truth to mingle fables feign'd."

The character of Celia is pretty, but in the satirical strokes lie all the genius of the work.

As for the Bas bleu.—You have heard me sigh after the attainment of other languages with hopeless yearning; yet I had rather be ignorant of them, as I am, if I thought their acquisition would induce me to clap my wings and crow in Greek, Latin and French, through the course of a poem which ought to have been written in an unaffected and unmingled English. I am diverted with its eulogies on Garrick, Mason, and Johnson, who all three hated each other so heartily. Not very pleasantly, I trow, would the two former have sat in the presence of Old Cato, as this poem oddly terms the arrogant Johnson, surrounded by the worshipful and worshipping Blue Stocking.—Had the cynic lived to hear his Whig-title, Cato, I could fancy him saying to the fair author,

"You had better have called me the first Whig, Madam, the father of the tribe, who got kicked out of Heaven for his republican principles." To the lady president herself, I fancy the cynic would not now, were he living, be the most welcome guest, since the publication of Mr Boswell's Tour. Miss More puts him to bed to little David. Their mutual opiates are pretty powerful, else her quondam friend, Garrick, would not thank her for his companion;—but misery, matrimony, and mortality, make strange bed-fellows.

Who is the Hortensius of this work, Burke, Fox, or Sheridan? and who the Lelius?

I thank you for your elegant prose translation of Horace's ode to Ligurinus. It convinces me that Smart was very incompetent to the task he undertook, with his "unexpected plume coming upon vanity, colour changing into a wrinkled face, and the question why the former cheeks of the youth cannot return to his present sentiments." Such strange misrendering of a poet's sense is surely most disgraceful to a scholastic pen. In my attempt to give this ode the poetic dress of our language, can you forgive a somewhat lavish expansion of the Horatian ideas?—Speak to me ingenuously concerning the manner in which you

think I have performed this your welcome task. Whatever you may dislike in the execution, I will endeavour to correct; and, when you have a leisure hour, favour me with a prose translation of the ode to Sallust. In Smart the ideas seem pretty, but there is to me an inscrutable obscurity in one part of his translation.

When I last wrote, I did not recollect that Falconer's Shipwreck stood so high in your good graces. I now recollect your having honoured that interesting poem with very warm applause, before I even knew of its existence. It was ungrateful in me, for a single instant, to have forgotten to whose taste I was first indebted for the melancholy pleasure of its perusal. The highly ingenious author ought to have had a place in the Hayleyan apotheosis of our epic poets. The Shipwreck has a better claim to be styled an epic poem than the Araucana, since, from Mr Hayley's translation, the latter appears to be rather a string of episodes, than one regular connected story.

I understand, that poetically to record any single event, diversified with different and discriminated characters, with noble sentiments, and with contrasted circumstances of pathos and horror, would entitle any composition to the name of

epic. So Falconer, by implication, terms his Shipwreck, in these lines,

> "A tale from dull oblivion to restore,
> Unknown to fame, and new to epic lore."

Mr Hayley denies the essentiality of supernatural machinery to epic poetry; he recognizes the Rape of the Lock as epic; he cannot, therefore, refuse that title to the more elevated poem of Falconer. In another edition, therefore, I hope to see the marine bard enrolled and characterized in that thrice-beautiful work, the Essays on Epic Poetry. Its author has not yet answered my letter on the subject of that witty, but ungenerous sport of fancy, the Old Maids. He is, I fear, displeased with my ingenuousness on that subject; yet I cannot repent of it.

How erroneously do the undiscerning many judge of character! My enemies say, "Miss Seward flatters." That is the construction which their spleen and coldness of heart puts upon a warm desire to please and oblige those I think estimable; upon the vivid glow of that praise which my heart delights to pour, when it can sincerely pour it. Truth can never be flattery. Alas! to the utter incapacity of flattering, even those I esteem and admire, I have, through life,

owed the loss of much favour that was, in itself, most desirable to my affections—but sincerity is the first duty of friendship; I should blush to commend, if I had not courage to confess my disapprobation. Should dear Mr Hayley be offended, I shall be deeply grieved, since words are weak to say how much I love, admire, and honour his genius, and his virtues. Well! his continued silence, or the style of his next letter will shew;

> ———" And come what may,
> Time and its hour runs thro' the roughest day."

I was much shocked lately to find, by the papers, that the mortal course of the excellent Dr John Jebb had closed. Never were the graces of conciliation, resulting from warm and ingenuous benevolence, more engagingly blended with superior talents, and high-strung virtues, than in that extraordinary man. When we met at Buxton, two years ago, and I perceived the languor of life-wasting disease in his graceful form, and pale, but sweet and interesting countenance, I lamented that I had not earlier known him, disposed, as he seemed, to honour me with his confidence and friendship. He indulged me with some long and kind letters since we parted—alas! to meet no more. My heart aches for his

unhappy widow. Never saw I connubial affection so unaffectedly animated as his to her, destitute as she was of every exterior charm. There is much misery in the world, yet I hope it is not often of such keen intenseness as poor Mrs Jebb now feels. Her abilities have masculine strength, her sensibilities every feminine excess. She idolized him—and well she might, since the uncommon plainness of her face, and withered leanness of her form, must treble the impression upon her gratitude and love, made by unremitting attention and impassioned tenderness. O! what a dreary desert is this world now to poor Mrs Jebb!—her earthly sun is set for ever!

Miss Reeves has shewn, in the Gentleman's Magazine for February, how heinously she takes the indignant remonstance which appeared in the preceding one, with my initials, and affects to suppose no *female* could be capable of what she deems so malicious an attack. Heaven knows it was not written with a malicious, though certainly with an incensed pen. Not even unjust reflections upon myself can excite my disdain more insuppressively than the injustice of criticism upon the talents of those great writers, from whom I have derived instruction and delight; nor is there any mode of degradation which appears to me

more ungenerous, than that of exhibiting some very inferior work of a celebrated writer, and asserting it to be his capital performance—especially where the nobler effusions of his genius have, through the cold frivolity of public taste, passed into a degree of general neglect, by which the rising generation is deprived of the great intellectual benefits which must ensue from their being admired and studied.

My poor father had another paralytic attack some ten days since; but, thank God! is now on his usual level of quiet, though feeble health. What unnatural weather! The past fortnight severely cold, as our snowy and piercing week at Wellsburn, in the last rigid December.

It flatters me that you wish to see a miscellany of mine on the same shelf with that of the Bard of Sussex. If health and leisure are lent me, I may one day present you with my poetic florets, collected in one garland; but faint will be their bloom and odour, compared with the magnolias, roses, and amaranths of the Hayleyan wreath.—Adieu!

LETTER XXXI.

To Mrs Martin

Lichfield, June 5, 1786.

After a month's whirl in the London vortex, the blooming and quiet shades of Lichfield have again received me; and filial pleasures, from the easy and quiet, though feeble state of my father's health; bless my return. You were, during my absence, a fleeting visionary beneath those shades. I regret that you made this transit through our precincts while I was away. I should have preferred talking to you of what I had seen and heard, to rushing back upon paper into the busy world I have left. In that attempt, much that interested must remain untold, untouched upon, or my letter would be of a length ill tallying with the scantiness of my leisure.

And now, from the much that I have observed, and the little which I have time to impart, what shall be selected? Shall I talk to you of our animated literary breakfastings, at the house of

* A near connection of Miss Seward, now resident at Bath.

Miss Helen Williams, Mr Mathias, &c.; of the belle esprits of both sexes, whose genius, wit, and knowledge, made those little meetings so brilliant?—or shall I talk to you of the abbey-music,

> "Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
> As from blest voices uttering joy?"

The last is the more popular theme; and therefore, if you please, it shall be ours. People universally assert, that the world never produced any thing of equal effect in the art. Indeed, I believe, that at these festivals, music touched her ne-plus ultra of excellence; for though, perhaps, every solo song has, from the impossibility of any single voice filling completely so immense a space, been heard in smaller scenes to greater advantage; yet, the sublimity of the harmonies, so full and complete in all those *great* effects which Handel's matchless genius conceived, though, from the comparative nothingness of the best band *those* days could afford him, he heard them not complete with his *mortal* ears; the exclusion of every thing harsh, and disagreeably noisy, by the care taken that no order of instruments, or of voices, should preponderate; the exquisite delicacy with which the songs were accompanied, and the picturesque power of several of the cho-

russes, that endued the ear with the powers of the eye;—all these admirables produced one grand result, that completely satisfied my imagination, high as report had taught me to set its claims.

Now as to the individual performers.—I allow to your favourite, Harrison, correctness, elegance, and taste, and all the *coyer* graces of his science; but his voice, however sweet, and, even in its tone, however enriched with that free and perfect shake, is very limited in its compass, and very moderate in its powers; while his manner is wholly destitute of that fine enthusiasm, which is vital to the just execution of Handel's glowing ideas, that breathe the soul of every passion in turn.

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Mrs Billington's voice is of great sweetness, compass, power, and execution; and her skill cannot be questioned, who played finely on the harpsichord at ten years old. Already she almost rivals Mara in the saramouch part of her performance; but has, however, too much sense to gambol like her in the sacred songs.—I breakfasted with Mr Bates, the director, and heard his seraphic wife excel in several of Handel's finest airs, Mara, and every other syren of the orchestra and stage. I observed to him, that Mara put too much gold fringe and tassels, upon

that solemn robe of melody, " I know that my Redeemer liveth." Do not say gold, Madam, he replied, it was despicable tinsel.

Yet justice will confess, that she has a rich fulness in all the natural parts of her voice, which leave her fair public rivals, and the misshapen and snuff-begrimed Rubenelli, at considerable distance.

Mrs Billington possesses a great deal of genuine beauty, and very unaffected and charming manners. Fame has traduced her chastity; but there are no meretricious traits in her countenance or conversation, which I had opportunities of observing, often meeting her in private musical parties. Adieu! Remark the length of my letter, and suffer it to expiate that of my preceding silence.

LETTER XXXII.

To Miss Powys.

Lichfield, June 25, 1786.

It rejoices me that you find yourself ultimately happier for your voluntary exertions. From

the native energy of your mind, I believed it would be so, and therefore approved your scheme. In *you*, it does not strike me as wonderful, that a charge of such inevitable anxiety should be undertaken, without any expectation of permanent gratitude from those on whom it lays such high obligations. Beneath long experience of the scarcity of that virtue, a spirit, warm and energetic as yours, will look for its certain reward solely to the pleasure it experiences in generous and well-directed exertions. Better directed no exertion can be, than in rendering the orphan daughters of a dear friend, young women, whose future influence over the feelings, the morals, and the happiness of others, may probably be extensive, more amiable than they have any chance of being, if their opening youth should be devoted to fashionable pursuits, and mere amusement; and, without any shield from intellectual cultivation, exposed to the allurement of dissipation, and to the untempered force of its pernicious effects upon the powers of thought, and the habits of industry.

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This summer's retirement, with its destined and varied plan of mental improvement, will form a test for the degree of native strength of mind which these lovely young women may possess.

If, amidst pursuits that should withdraw them from the power of the senses, and from the narrow and selfish gratifications of personal vanity; amidst pursuits that tend to make the past, the distant, and the future preponderate over the present, you perceive the spirits languid, the attention wandering, and the memory employed in recollection, and, in anticipation of frivolous scenes, it will be wise to prepare yourself for a blighted and barren harvest as to *mind*, with whatever care you may prepare the soil, and however liberally you may sow the seeds of intellectual cultivation.

O! lost Honora! it is not possible to speak on this subject, without recollecting the striking proof thy seventeenth year afforded of heart and mind triumphant over juvenile vanity. How incapable was all the unkindness of thy married life to banish the recollection of that letter, written secretly to my mother in the autumn of the year 1770, intreating that she would urge her own ill health, though not at that time worse than usual, to * Mr Sneyd, that his consent might be obtained for thy return to Lichfield from Bath, when thou wert, at that instant, the toast of that gay city; where every eye pursued thee with ad-

* Honora's father.

miration, and every tongue with praise! *Never* can I forget the hazard to which thou didst put thy precious life, by passing those deep waters, that seemed rising to keep us asunder; never the transport with which thou didst bound into the dining-room; the tears of joy from those beautiful eyes, that wet my cheek on our first embrace, after those long three months of anxious absence; leaving us, as thou didst, with every dread prognostic of consumption, and returning in full health, the blessed boon of the Bristol waters. Continually present to my recollection is the delight with which thou didst then first draw thy chair to our domestic hearth, where quiet, affection, and the spirit of intellectual expansion, were the only Lares. How do I love to recal the tender exultation with which thy dear hands were folded and clasped together, for having exchanged balls and plays, and malls and parades, for books and conversation with me, and with a few chosen friends! The triumphs of youth and beauty for the disclosures of the heart and mind, and the voice of adulation for that of sincere affection! Hope cannot present a *future* joy half so dear as these priceless recollections, lodged beyond the reach of fate, while memory remains to me.

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My pleasures, during my late excursion to town, were allayed by the regrets I felt for being obliged to decline countless kind invitations, and that from the destined limits of my stay, the extension of which filial duty would not permit. I was honoured by finding several literary parties formed on my account; and they were replete with every gratification to my spirit. I profess no unnatural stoicism to the praises of the learned and ingenious; nor could I listen with an undelighted ear to the warm approbation of my Horatian paraphrases expressed in these circles. The Ode to Phyllis has a domestic, joyous, picturesque festivity, which will interest and please you. Its spirit has wretchedly evaporated in every former translation that has met my eye from Francis and others. I who, like yourself, think the delights of social friendship possess the highest zest, have at least translated that ode *con amore*. Such hours, and such days of animated preparation, and of vivid enjoyment, you and I have tasted beneath this roof.

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LETTER XXXIII.

To Arch-Deacon Clive*.

Lichfield, June 27, 1786.

By my ingenious and learned friends, Mr Grove of Lichfield, and Mr Dewes of Wellsburn, I was first induced to the attempt of giving to some of the most beautiful lyric compositions of Horace, that freedom and air of originality, without which poetry is so little worth. They observed to me, that, always charming, and often sublime as they are, very few indeed have been so translated, as that people, conversant with good English poetry, could bear them as translations; or, not understanding Latin, could like them as poems. They mutually advised me *thus*, unconscious of each other's counsel, viz.—to read over the prose construction attentively, of those odes whose general idea pleased me, without consulting any previous versification of them; to seize that *leading* idea; to write upon it freely; to use any allusion, metaphor, or imagery, that might

* Resident in Shropshire.

strike me as applicable, careless whether or not Horace has applied it, provided it be consistent with the Roman mythology, customs, and manners. Upon this plan, which I have followed, my versions have frequently little pretences to verbal fidelity, though, by some of the first scholars of the age, complimented with possessing the Horatian spirit.

My only objection to the style and manner of Horace's lyric poems is, that he leaves too much to the imagination. To leave *something* to the suppliance of the heart and the fancy, has often the best possible effect; yet that is only where we are sure of their responsibility for the deficience. Nothing that is obscure can be generally interesting; and, whatever amusement *Critics* may find in their researches into occult meanings, it is always wise in the poet to preclude them from such pastime. Horace, however, did not take that precaution; or rather, perhaps, the lapse of centuries has rendered passages dim which were originally sufficiently luminous. In our time, and in our language, it should be the business of his translator, paraphraser, and imitator, to draw the dark hint into poetic day-light.

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The Gentleman's Magazine for last month contains some little poetic gems, of exquisite

lustre, from the pen of Mr Stevens of Repton, in Derbyshire—an English version of the first part of Horace's Ode to Grosphus, and of the Greek poet Moschus's fourth Idyllium; and also an original sonnet, which has no poetic fault, however it may sin on the score of partiality to *me*. The stupidity of review-criticism, and the as stupid respect paid to it by the general reader, blighted the first rich fruits of this gentleman's imagination, and, by damping his poetic ardour, has robbed our age of the light of his genius, to which nature gave strength, and to which learning gave purity. O! there is nothing against which my spirit more revolts, than to see dulness deciding upon works of imagination, or envy endeavouring to darken them. I wish none were permitted to enter the lists of criticism but those who feel poetic beauty as keenly as yourself, and who have the same generous desire that others should feel it. Adieu.

LETTER XXXIV.

To Miss Weston.

Lichfield, July 20, 1786.

Yes, truly, dear Sophia, our public critics are curious deciders upon poetic claims. Smiled you not to see the reviewer of verse, in a late Gentleman's Magazine, gravely pronouncing, "that it is trifling praise for Mrs Smith's sonnets to pronounce them superior to Shakespeare's and Milton's? O! rare panegyrist! Such praise may vie, as an offering at the shrine of dulness, with the censure which the Monthly Review passed on Jephson's noble tragedy, the Count of Narbonne, and with that fulminated in the Critical one against the first fair blooms of Mr Stevens's poetic talents, his charming poem, Retirement. Thus it is that the extremes of unfeeling censure, and of hyperbolic encomium, meet in one sickening point of absurdity."

"'Tis such the goddess bears with special grace,
While veils of fogs dilate her awful face."

You say Mrs Smith's sonnets are pretty;—so say I; —*pretty* is the proper word; pretty tuneful centos from our various poets, without any thing original. All the lines that are not the lines of others are weak and unimpressive; and these hedge-flowers to be preferred, by a critical dictator, to the roses and amaranths of the two first poets the world has produced!!!—It makes one sick.

The allegory in this lady's Origin of Flattery, is to me wholly incomprehensible:—Why Venus should take the helmet of Mars, for a vessel in which to make the oil of flattery, I cannot understand. You will find all that is tolerable in this poem taken from Hesiod's rise of Woman, translated by Parnel.

Much, indeed very much, above every thing Mrs Smith has published, are the poems of Helen Williams. We trace in them true sensibility of heart, and the genuine fires of an exalted imagination. Who would not forgive to their sparkling effervescence the occasional want of metaphoric accuracy, with all the other juvenile errors of a judgment as yet unripened by time?

Ere I quit the critical theme, permit me to inveigh against the present senseless custom of excluding all capitals except at the beginning of sentences, and to actual proper names. Such exclusion is of serious bad consequence to poetry,

I mean to the general taste for it, by rendering it more difficult to be understood by the common reader. Capitals to every substantive are cumbrously intrusive upon the eye, but surely to whatever is impersonized, to whatever acts, a capital letter is as necessary as to a proper name. When abstracted qualities are clothed and embodied by fancy, common sense revolts at their sneaking appearance with a little letter. If we say, "We feel pleasure in contemplating the lovely scene," it is proper to write pleasure with a small letter; but if we say, "Pleasure shed all her lustre over the scene," the word requires a large one as much as any other proper name. It was said to a public singer, who sung an energetic song of Handel's too tamely, "Zounds, Sir, you spell God with a little g."

You will find, in the Gentleman's Magazine for June last, a pretty poem of my father's. It contains little sketches of his own local vicissitudes, and of the characters of his brother Canons, then of this cathedral. I had forgotten it, not having seen its face these twenty years, nor knew I that a copy was extant. We have no guess by what means it crept into that publication, but I am glad it is preserved.

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In a former letter I spoke to you of the gratification my musical enthusiasms met during a late expedition to town;—but think I forgot to mention that I had three or four interviews with the extraordinary and pleasing Mrs ———. She is in as strong health, and as lively spirits, is as witty, as humorous, as eloquent, as friendly, as insinuating, as fascinating as ever; but more than ever snuffy, and dirty, and paltry in her dress; and, amidst her accumulated wealth, more than ever penurious in all her habits.

For the first time, I saw the justly celebrated Mrs Siddons in comedy,—in Rosalind:—but though her smile is as enchanting, as her frown is magnificent, as her tears are irresistible, yet the playful scintillations of colloquial wit, which most strongly mark that character, suit not the dignity of the Siddonian form and countenance. Then her dress was injudicious. The scrupulous prudery of decency, produced an ambiguous vestment, that seemed neither male nor female. When she first came on as the princess, nothing could be more charming; nor than when she resumed her original character, and exchanged comic spirit for dignified tenderness.

One of those rays of exquisite and original discrimination, which her genius so perpetually elicits, shone out on her first rushing upon the stage

in her own resumed person and dress; when she bent her knee to her father, the Duke, and said—

"To you I give myself—for I am yours;"

and when, falling into Orlando's arms, she repeated the same words,—

"To *you* I give myself—for I am *yours!*"

The marked difference of her look and voice in repeating that line, and particularly the last word of it, was inimitably striking. The tender joy of filial love was in the first; the whole soul of enamoured transport in the second. The extremely heightened emphasis on the word *yours*, produced an effect greater than you can conceive could result from the circumstance, without seeing and hearing it given by that mistress of the passions.

— — — — — —

I do not wonder that the idea of meeting Mrs ——— in public jars you.

———"Not the basilisk
More deadly to the sight, than to the soul
The cool injurious eye of frozen kindness.
Let us not meet its poison."

Adieu, dear Sophia; far be from your spirit every baleful impression!

LETTER XXXV.

To Mrs Stokes*

Lichfield, August 9, 1786.

My acquaintance is such a nothing at Shrewsbury, dear friend, that I cannot hope my recommendations could be of use to Dr Stokes;—but what I can I will. After all that could be done by introduction, even where its sources are plenteous as mine are limited, it is to the luck of some remarkable cures that young physicians must owe their rising into practice. The sense of pain, and the dread of death, are arbitrary impulses, before which all lesser considerations vanish.

Yes, indeed, my expectations were more than answered by the abbey-music. In smaller scenes the single songs have certainly been heard to more advantage; but all that resulted from the blended harmony, both of voices and instruments, was above description, and beyond compare. The

* The lady of Dr Stokes, physician of Chesterfield, Derbyshire: when first intimate with Miss Seward, she was Miss Rogers of Dronfield, in that county.

picturesque powers of some of the chorusses seemed miraculous. Above all others, in that celebrated one from Israel in Egypt, which describes the return of the Red-sea over the host of Pharaoh. It is then that we felt the dire situation from the clang of the trumpets, the thunder of the drums, the sounds of wild dismay, which burst in vollies from every part of the vast orchestra, whilst a distinct melody was preserved amidst the fearful and mingled tones, as the horse and his rider were thrown into the sea.

You inquire after my correspondence with the illustrious H——. It is not what it was; but the deficiency, or cause of deficiency, proceeds not from me. I honour and love him as well as ever; yet I feel that the silver cord of our amity is loosening at more links than one.

People teaze me with applications to write epitaphs upon their favourite friends. Of frequent compliance, there would be no end, and I could wish never to attempt another. That path of composition is so narrow, and so beaten, that one cannot hope to gather in it one novel floret, especially where an uneventful life, and a consequently monotonous virtue preclude the possibility of appropriate praise.

As to Madam Genlis on Education, I like not the experiments she is perpetually making on the

minds and dispositions of her pupils, at the expence of truth. Truth ought never to be violated with children, much less should its violation form part of a system. Neither do I approve of the climax of excellence in the books which she would recommend as the proper studies of young people between fifteen and twenty-five. The species of books that first interest and delight the opening mind about fifteen, we may say, will continue to charm and interest through life, more than any other kind of books. Remembered delight, and associated ideas, will chain the inclinations to that level. A naturally intelligent mind, especially beneath the guidance of an instructor who has just taste, will be found capable of feeling the most elevated compositions in prose and verse at fifteen. Sensibility and enthusiasm, then in their pristine, and consequently strongest glow, have an intuitive impression of the vast, the wonderful, the fair, and the elegant. There is no danger, that first-rate excellence in writing will make it less charming to youth, whose taste, in that respect, should early be set as high as possible.

But what an interesting story is that of the imprisoned Duchess! I am in possession of some original letters from Dr Johnson to Miss Boothby, for whom he had a platonic passion. One

of them begins thus:—"It is midnight; I am alone, and in no disposition to slumber. How shall I employ this waste hour of darkness and vacuity?"

Alas! for the story is true; how did that unhappy woman employ *nine* waste *years* of darkness and vacuity? When, in 1764, Mr Porter came over from Italy to marry my lovely sister, he told us that singular and almost incredible circumstance, of a woman of fashion, in that country, having then been just discovered and rescued from a nine years confinement in a subterraneous dungeon, into which no ray of light had, in the long long interval, ever penetrated. But he did not, like Madam Genlis, represent her innocent, though, with great horror and compassion, he instanced that dire revenge, as a consequence of Italian jealousy, which had not reconciled itself to the cicesbeo privileges.

I hope you will find Shrewsbury a prosperous, as certainly it is a pleasant residence.

> "Admired Salopia! that, with venial pride,
> View'st thy fair form in Severn's lucid wave,"

Be thou auspicious to the health, the interest, and the fame of my friends!

Mr Saville desires his best remembrances to you and the Doctor, whose botanic enthusiasm

he shares. The botanists all love each other the better for the knowledge and vegetable treasures that each possess.

Ah! why do not the bards thus also? Envy throws not brands into the conservatory—Why will she so often throw them upon the lyre?

LETTER XXXVI.

To George Hardinge*, Esq.

Lichfield, Sept. 10, 1786.

"If Miss Seward remembers Mr Hardinge!" Ah! dull of spirit, if the traces of those few hours, in which she was honoured with his conversation, had faded in her memory!

On their first meeting, he was so good, at Mr Boothby's request, to read a few passages from the Paradise Lost, as he sat on the window of her dressing-room. "Poetry was then poetry indeed." The ear of her imagination has often brought back his cadences. Born an enthusiast,

* Nephew to Lord Camden, and Attorney-General to the Queen.

time has but little abated that propensity, in despite of her consciousness, that, in this marble age, nothing is more unfashionable.

Yes, Sir, from the retired situation in which my life has passed away, I have followed you through your brighter and more elevated track, with distant but earnest gaze, and rejoiced in your expanding fame.

Two of your sonnets were given me, to the Fountain, and to the Lyre of Petrarch. With them, amongst others, have I often combated the unmeaning assertion of pedants, that the legitimate sonnet suits not the genius of our language, producing those * Avignon little gems as its perfect refutation.

While these arise to the honour of Mr Hardinge's genius, his generous exertions to promote the amiable and highly ingenious Miss Helen Williams's interest, in the subscription to her poems, do equal honour to his benevolence.

My mother's death, and my father's incapacity for every kind of business, have involved me in much of that employment which seems the contradiction of my fate; so that, together with an inconveniently extensive correspondence, and the social pleasures, by which I am very seducible,

* The sonnets alluded to were written at Avignon.

little time is left for versifying; yet several thousand lines, of former composition, in the heroic, lyric, and sonnet measure, have long slumbered in my writing-desk, vainly waiting the always receding hour of transcript and revision.

The terms in which you mention my poetical novel, Louisa, gratify me extremely. I know it is the best and ablest of my publications. There may certainly be a best, even where nothing is very good.

Flattered that you preserve an agreeable remembrance of our long past and transient interviews, and that you think the employments of my muse worth this inquiry, I remain, Sir, &c.

LETTER XXXVII.

REV. T. S. WHALLEY.

Lichfield, Sept. 23, 1786.

MY late long silence has been involuntary. I accounted for it in a recent letter to you at Strasbourg. Mention not my miscellany; I am hopeless about it. Without time to revise my own writings, people persecute me with requests to

examine and correct those of others. It is an heavy evil of authorism. Several poetic tasks, and some prose ones, the execution of which is important to my wishes, lie before me, as water before the lip of Tantalus. My Horatian odes are almost the sum-total of my poetry during the last twelve-months. Not only by yourself, and several othe. literary friends, but by the public prints, I am exhorted to go through with the odes of Horace. They, and you also, flatter me, that such a work would be a valuable acquisition to English verse; but I have no time; besides, there are many which it would be impossible to render interesting, and others, and which are unfit for the female pen.

Let us turn to a more heart-engaging theme. Ah! dear, and ever dear friend, your letter from Strasbourg to Sophia, delights me, as breathing an homeward air; yet, what it says of your health, is far from being all I wish. The death of excellent Mrs E. Whalley has, doubtless, injured it, through the generous excess of your sympathetic feelings. The reconciling power of time, will, I trust, ere long, brace your nerves again, and restore the tone of your constitution. Neither is our Sophia well. She now seeks to renovate a disordered frame on the dreary shores of Aberistwith.

I am just returned from paying a delightful visit, of three weeks, to my friends, Mr and Mrs Granville. Accomplished and excellent Mr Dewes was of our party. The situation of their villa, Calwich, near Ashbourn, is as singular as it is beautiful; standing on the extremest verge of a large and very lucid sheet of water, through which runs the river Dove. It comes winding down from Dovedale to Ilelham, and from thence to Calwich. Gentle hills, the nurselings of the peak mountains, form a semi-circle round the lake, opposite the house, at about a mile's distance. It is quite fairy-land, so verdant are its lawns, so crystal its streams. The minds of its owners are cultivated as the valley, and clear as the lake.

The lady of that lake is young, pretty, graceful, and admired, but loves her home and domestic duties, as well as it is natural for those to do, who bear about them no such magnetism, either of person or manners, to attract attention, or stimulate flattery. Yet is not Mrs Granville coldly unsocial; she mixes with the large neighbourhood around her, with cheerful pleasure; but her most enjoyed days are those in which books, needle-works, and the conversation of her more intimate friends, give wings to the hours.

The weather was not propitious to the out-door pleasures of this interesting visit. In days

which should have been those of autumnal prime, storms often infesting the wane of that season, howled over the lawns and lake, and through the bowers of Calwich. No morning was unsullied by rainy clouds, till that of my departure, which arose in despiteful beauty. I left Aurora shaking her amber tresses on the rocks, and hills, and waters. On returning home, the placid health of my dear enfeebled father completed the pleasures of a period, in which the light of mind recompenced the watery gloom of a long-sullen atmosphere.

Your friend, Pratt, has been making a fresh, though not a new, attack upon my poems, in reviewing those of dear Helen Williams. Though my old enemy shifts his ground, he continues to fire off his darling simile of rags and tatters for my muse.

The most charming novel I have read these many years, Caroline de Lichfield, formed part of our amusement at Calwich. It is a unique of its kind, resembling no other novel. Mr Dewes Englished it aloud and extempore from the French, in language at once fluent and graceful. Doubtless you have read it. What a wonderful interest in the last solemn appointment made by Lindorffe to meet Caroline in the pavilion!—What a moment, when he lays the manuscript on

the knees of Caroline, and rushes from her into the wood with wild precipitation!

Sophia ardently presses me to visit her at Ludlow next summer. If my father's health permits, I may hope to enjoy that pleasure. For her and her mother's sake, I wish their mansion more spacious and pleasant; but, for my own part, the gratifications of such a visit would not suffer me to hear the din of the blacksmith's hammer, whose vicinity she laments, nor to feel the straightness of my apartment. You and Mrs W. will be in England ere summer comes. Ah! if we could meet at Ludlow! What an agreeable day-dream is that hope! Waft it to me across the ocean; and may the months of bloom see it realized!

LETTER XXXVIII.

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 11, 1786.

MY DEAR BARD,

YOUR friend, the ingenious, benevolent, and energetic Dr Warner, lately passed a few days in

Lichfield. He came hither, possessed with the idea, that I was the author of a new poem, entitled The Triumph of Benevolence, on his darling subject, the immediate order for a statue to the honour of the great Howard. It is a favourite subject with every person whose heart glows with enthusiasm, the noblest enthusiasm, that of humanity: but for the verses, I never saw or heard of them, till I learnt, from * Longinus's letter, sent by the Doctor, that he also believed them mine.

My muse is too high of spirit to have produced a work on the dear exalted Howard, which has such boundless inferiority to that ode of yours on the same theme, and which gave him his poetic apotheosis. I would as soon have attempted to write a new Iliad.

There is something like genius, however, in this same poem; but it is the random fire of an inexperienced writer, little acquainted with some of the most essential rules of poetic arrangement: Hence, the descending to parts, after he had advanced the whole; to individuals, after he had mentioned their species;—hence, what are only different names for the same virtue, as courage

* The ingenious and classical Mr Long, an eminent Surgeon in London, and the confidential friend of Mr Hayley.

and bravery, &c. separately personified, and attempted to be brought to the eye in one group :— hence also, the uncongenial epithet, the colloquial vulgarism, and frequent anti-climax.

I wrote to Longinus the morning after our breakfast-consultations, in which we endeavoured to improve and elevate this ill-executed work against a subsequent edition. In this letter to L., I stated some of my purposed alterations ; but there was no making a fine poem from such crude materials. At least, however, my proud heart swelled to convince him, that no haste could have betrayed me into suffering such lines to pass the press, as I had tried to mend.

Dr W. is excessively desirous, that this composition should be made as good as the stock of ideas on which it is written will permit. I desired his permission to repeat to him your ode to Howard, since no degree of familiarity with its beauties can pall the delight of reconsidering them in a heart like his. The sensibility he shewed as I read, recompensed the fatigue of criticising, and of trying to bring into shape that abortive work, which presumes to take the same ground.

What a beautiful idea is yours of a lamp, which should shed around the statue of Howard a splendid and perpetual light! I should like to have

the office of guarding it from extinction.—Priestess to the lamp of benevolence! Such an appointment might exalt, to some degree of dignity, the derided state of stale maidenhood.

No, indeed, not mine, the very able Johnsonian Analysis in the European Magazine. Pray inform Longinus of my disavowal.

I am glad you so warmly admire my favourite Caroline de Lichfield; that work, which abounds in situations which make curiosity gasp, admiration kindle, and pity dissolve. This novel is a unique of its kind, and neither imitates or resembles any other. We shall see plenty written in imitation of it, but they will be worthless.

I knew nothing of the publication of those sweet lines you sent me on the card inclosed in the pocket-book Mrs Hayley worked for me. It is true they have been shewn with pride and pleasure, whenever that pocket-book was noticed and admired; but I do not recollect having ever given any copy; nor would I, without their author's leave, have consented to their publication, however I might wish to shelter myself from the abuse of my writings in the European Magazine and English Review, beneath the bright and invulnerable armour of Mr Hayley's praise.

Giovanni and I often execrate together the malicious author of that invective in the Gentleman's Magazine for June, upon a certain work, which, however we might, in some respects, have wished otherwise, no more deserves such censure, than the lightnings which dart in our hemisphere, and which are not without their danger, deserve to be classed as an evil with the baneful explosions of Mount Etna.

Mrs Knowles brought hither her admirable stage-coach manuscript. The adventure was fortunately ludicrous for the amusement of her friends; but most unfortunately so, for the self-consequence of Dr * Bamble-Bee. What admirable fun has she made of his epicurism, his spleen, and his cullibility! Adieu!

LETTER XXXIX.

THE REV. DR WARNER.

Lichfield, Oct. 13, 1786.

THE suspicion of being *blandished* into vanity, has more colour on my side than on yours;

* Dr Bro——by.

since, in a friendship between an unlearned female and a man of education, knowledge, and science, it is easy to see on which side the honour lies:—but of such a design, I trust we are neither of us seriously disposed to suspect each other. There are circumstances and situations in which the minds of two people become more completely unveiled in a few hours, than they would perhaps be in more than as many years of ordinary intercourse. The thrice amiable and noble design, which you pursue with so much ardour, proves to me, that your heart is ingenuous, warm, and affectionate. It is to such that mine feels affianced.

Too justly does Mr Selwyn call this the marble age, so polished! so cold! It is sick of the disease of not admiring; and that morbid ennui is epidemic amongst us; but I think you and I are not infected. We may be subject to other maladies; but that indurated plague-spot is not upon us.

Nothing was ever more absurd, than opposing the inferior virtues of Hanway to those of Howard. I hope I am not uncharitable; but I can scarcely think the man genuinely good, who seemed to fancy his own comparatively feeble exertions, had equal right to public gratitude with those of the matchless philanthrophic hero. Han-

way was too surely jealous of the expanding fame of *him*, whose excellence seems the most powerful emanation of deity that was ever shed on the human spirit.

We must take care, that the wit of your friend about the monument and the statue running a race, does not transpire. Ennui would take up the fancy with a cold smile, saunter with it to her sister Caricature, and mischief would ensue; for blighting is the effect of ridicule upon public sensibility.

Fanatics have almost always cold hearts. Mr Cowper, whose poetic talents have such glowing and creative powers, professes himself, in the Task, a contemner of all praise, which has not Deity for its exclusive object. The plain meaning of what he says on the subject is just this;—"You fools, with your jubilee for your Shakespeare, and your commemoration for your Handel! What is it to you, that one was the first poet, the other the first musician in the world? What is it to you, if one employed his talents in promoting the moral virtues, and the other in exciting the spirit of devotion? Neither of them can get you a better place in Heaven. Away, then, with your idle disinterested encomiums and honours. Praise only HIM who can permanently reward your praises." These are the maxims of

those cold-hearted devotionists, whose religion is composed of selfishness and terror. I cannot think that the oblations of such mere parasites in religion can be acceptable as those of the benevolent man, whose piety is the result of blended gratitude to his Maker, and of kindling esteem and love for whatever is great and worthy in man; who praises such efforts, without coldly pausing to consider, whether he shall get any thing by his encomiums, here or hereafter.

Since all the powers of the human mind in science and art, as well as in religion and morality, are the gift of God, to applaud and to commemorate their industrious cultivation, cannot be displeasing to their great Giver. Shall he not lend a gracious observance of such liberal and unenvying testimony of fraternal love from one created being to another? Mr Cowper bends an eagle glance upon the follies and vices of his contemporaries, and an owlish one upon their talents and virtues. He will be likely enough to bid his austere muse frown upon the design of such a public testimony of honour for the rare and energetic virtue of Howard.

> "Yet do not thou for that, or for ought else
> Of cynic opposition bate one jot
> Of heart or hope!—But still bear up, and steer
> Right onward!"

Farewell!

LETTER XL.

Miss Scott.

Lichfield, Oct. 20, 1786.

The visible dejection of your mind, when you wrote last, pains me; so does it to learn that a new complaint, in the most important of our senses, is added to the many other circumstances of corporal annoyance, that have often made the hours, to which your talents are so capable of giving wings,

> ———" Move slowly on
> With dull and flagging pinion."

May their dark and retarding influence descend seldomer upon you! It is too much to hope that they may *never* come to the healthiest and the happiest.

> " Who dreams of nature free from nature's strife?
> Who dreams of perfect happiness below?
> The hope-flush'd enterer on the stage of life,
> The youth to knowledge unchastis'd by woe."

Your objection to the monotonous chime of the legitimate sonnet, from the four times repeated rhyme, would be just, if the sense were carried on, as in the couplet, to the end of each line. But that jingling effect is entirely done away where the verses run into each other with undulating flow, and varied pause, after the manner of blank verse, as in the sublime anathema of Milton on the massacre at Piedmont.

— — — — — —

I have read Mr G——'s essays, and like many of them extremely; but that mania of the imagination about weakened nature and exhausted art, in the poetic line, is strongly upon him. He should be above such idle prejudice, which has been the common cant in all ages.

Never was there so rich a galaxy of poetic stars as have shone out, with perpetual augmentation to their number, within the last half century. Mighty is the power of prejudice, when she weaves a web thick and dark enough to conceal their lustre from the eyes of her votaries. It is true, we have not a Shakespeare and a Milton, but that is not owing to nature having become more penurious respecting the gift of genius, but to the fastidiousness of refinement, and the severity of criticism.

I entered the lists with Mr G—— when I was in town last spring, on this subject; and, after I had enumerated our modern bards, living and extinct, who have adorned the last fifty years, and he had, somewhat reluctantly, been brought to acknowledge the genuine spirit, originality, and grace of their compositions, he was candid enough to acknowledge also, that his decisions against the claims of the moderns were hasty and unjust.

I know there is a great falling off since Johnson's Lives of the Poets appeared. It is in the taste of the public, however, not in the genius of individuals; but the induration on the sensibility of excellence in the higher walks of poetry, which *that* work has so generally produced, will, in future, create the paucity it does not meet. Who takes the trouble of singing to the deaf, or of painting for the blind?

But it is time to close my epistle. Ere this period, I hope your eyes have regained their strength, and again permit the streams of wisdom and genius to flow in upon your mind from the pages of ancient and modern literature. What a misfortune to feel the soul thirsting for them in vain through ocular impediment! Heaven preserve all I love from such deprivation!

LETTER XLI.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 4, 1786.

I AM perfectly of David Garrick's opinion respecting your jeu d'esprit, and cannot return it without your reiterated commands. Were I Lord Chancellor, I should not think it necessary to crush such a blossom of my youth, nor wish to prevent its floating on the public gale. It is so light, so vivid, so original. Be you, however, assured, that if you permit its stay with me, no copy shall be given, nor shall it steal into circulation through the thievish memory of listeners, who have taste enough to intreat a second recital—then beg to be favoured with it a moment in their hand. It is thus Mr Hayley's impromptu, sent in the pocket-book Mrs Hayley worked for me, got abroad; and, by the failure of memory in one word, lost a material beauty. The book has an embroidered lyre on one side, and a laurel wreath on the other. The mistaken line was written in the original,—

" Go thou embroider'd wreath and mimic lyre ;"

It is printed,

" Go thou embroider'd wreath and muses' lyre."

The common epithet, *muses'* lyre, injures the accurate delicacy of the whole.

Hayley is indeed a true poet; he has the fire and the invention of Dryden, without any of his absurdity; and he has the wit and ease of Prior. If his versification is a degree less polished than Pope's, it is more various. We find the numbers sweet and flowing, and, I think, sufficiently abundant in the graces of harmony. Our four years correspondence has been enriched with a galaxy of little poetic gems, of the first water. Were I to be honoured with their insertion all together in his miscellany, I should rival, in his brilliant celebration, the Chloe of Prior, and the Stella of Swift.

Your letter is extremely gratifying to my self-attachment. We are perfectly congenial in our love of praise. I think, with you, that it is sweeter to be beloved than admired; and that, consequently, commendation is the more welcome from our consciousness of its partiality. The cold-hearted monitor would perhaps tell us, " it is flattery, your encomiast is not sincere." I should be tempted to reply, that is his own affair; and,

concluding it so, we at least receive proof of some respect, and wish to please us, when people take the trouble of fibbing without any other impelling interest than the desire of gratifying and obliging us. Certainly, however, the partial praise is a thousand times more precious than the flattery; and I please myself with believing *that* which you bestow on me and mine, is totally of the former kind. I have had the good fortune to interest you, for you tell me so; and, ingenuously confessing your disapprobation of the opening of one of my sonnets, that I inclosed, you teach me to rely on your sincerity. Be ever thus frank, and my entire confidence shall ensue. You will find another copy in this cover, which probably may remove your objection.

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I am glad to hear that Milton's sonnet to Laurence is peculiarly dear to you, who are so warm and just an admirer of many of its brethren. I could never read it without a pleasure that thrilled through my brain. O! such winter days, and such winter evenings, how they spangle over existence like a few bright stars in a gloomy horizon. This is certainly the most *touching* of Milton's sonnets; but that to the soldier to spare his dwelling-place is the most sublime. How we love to see the great man asserting the claims of

his own genius with manly firmness, and declaring its inevitable claim to confer lasting celebrity!

Your exclamation, "Milton no ear!" did I vociferate many times a-day, a long while after I had first started back from the assertion in Mr T. Warton's edition of the Juvenile Poems of that illustrious Being. With every other observation in Mr Warton's highly ingenious and generally eloquent notes, I was extremely delighted. He is undoubtedly the first public critic of this age. Sweet numbers have flowed from Warton's pen. It is not possible he should be unconscious of the varied, the matchless grace of Milton's versification through the Paradise Lost, which could only result from the most exquisite delicacy of ear. What, then, could produce from the judicious, the candid, the animated pen of T. Warton, the delirium of that decision?

I am charmed to find you amongst the adorers of Milton's Lycidas. That is a test-composition; and to read it without pleasure—to *have* read it without frequent recurrence, argues a morbid deficiency in the judgment and in the affections. I know that it is reprobated by Johnson; but false criticism, on the pale horse of that despot, is the pest of the present times, trampling beneath its

" armed hoofs," the richest and rarest flowers of genius. *Adieu.*

LETTER XLII.

MR REPTON.

Lichfield, Oct. 20, 1786.

YOU are in no danger of mistaking your own talents; but you mistake mine in supposing that I can assist you in writing comedy or humorous prologue. Perhaps I may have imagination, but humour is not the growth of my brain. Wit is your talent. You say your characters all talk like yourself. If indeed you wanted them to sigh and talk fine, like Mr Cumberland's personages, and draw tears instead of laughter, from the audience, I might perhaps assist you. But you are wiser, and know how eligible it is to keep the orders of dramatic composition separate and distinct, unless they could be blended after Shakespeare's manner, and with his boldness and fire; and if that ability existed, our fastidious age would not endure the attempt. It does not per-

mit a dramatic writer to hazard any thing with impunity.

In those walks which it has not proscribed, who treads most happily? Sheridan, certainly; and he follows the track of Congreve. All Congreve's characters, and most of Sheridan's, are without much strict appropriation in the turn of their separate dialogue. Neither of these writers were able to restrain the torrent of their wit from flowing into every bay, channel, creek, or even gutter of the dramatis personæ, where, perhaps, folly and insipidity, being more natural, might have had a better effect, the dead colouring increasing, by contrast, the lustre of the splendid tints: but few obtain the *best-possible* in any line of intellectual exertion.

Be you therefore content to commit splendid sins, against strict appropriation, with Congreve and Sheridan. If we sometimes perceive the levelling spirit of luxuriant wit, we are tolerably willing to pardon its excesses.

LETTER XLIII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 23, 1786.

Yes, indeed, Dr Davies* had genuine poetic fancy, and his numbers were often graceful and harmonious. So far I think with you; but must dissent from your assertion that "he is a poet sweet as any of modern times;" times that boast of Gray, Mason, Collins, Hayley, Beattie, Cowper, Chatterton, Burns, with many others who hold the poetic torch much higher surely than it was lifted by the gentle, the elegant Davies.

In my girlish days I knew him well, and always shed tears of delight when I listened to him from the pulpit, for his manner of preaching was ineffable:—a voice of tremulously pathetic softness! religious energies, struggling through constitu-

* Dr Davies was, during several years, canon residentiary of Lichfield cathedral. A few of his poetic compositions enrich the 5th vol. of the edition of Dodsley's poems printed in 1782. But a much larger number of his pieces may be found in the volume of Whaley's poems, dedicated to Horace Walpole. They are there under this title, "By a Friend."—*S.*

tional timidity; but in all his words, his looks, his manners, within and without the church, there looked out of a feeble frame a spirit beatified before its time.

Amidst the much that delighted me in your last packet, not Warton's declaration, that Milton had no ear, amazed me more than yours, that you see nothing great in Hayley's compositions; and that Mason, the sweet Claude of our science, is no poet. No poet! What is it then that thrills my veins, and fills my eyes with the tears of delight, whenever I open his volumes? I never saw Mason, never desire to see him, because I believe him to be proud and fastidious; yet not the more

> "Cease I to wander where his muse may haunt
> Clear spring, or shady grove—or sunny hill,
> Smit with the love of her mellifluent song."

Alas! I knew that the poetic laurels strike with no enduring root till they spring from the *grave* of genius, conscious as I was that fame is the result of many suffrages, which slowly accumulate as time rolls on. That tardiness of accumulation, I believed to be caused by the scarcity of true poetic taste, and by the envy of contemporary rivals; but I little expected to hear a man of genius, who writes poetry very finely himself, without being a candidate for public honours in that

line, and who is, therefore, unlikely to be influenced by unworthy jealousy, to perceive *such* a correspondent slumbering on the sofa of ennui, and excluding the sun with its silken curtains!—but, as your heart is generous, I do not despair to convince you that decisions, which have so astonished me, were the result of indolent inattention to the writings of these two first poets of the present day.

— — — — — —

I cannot adopt your dislike to cutting off the letter *e*, when the elision is useful to the measure of verse; nor agree with you that Milton is remarkably merciful to that little vowel. In the exordiums of the 3d, 4th, and 5th books of the Paradise Lost, it is cut off thus:

"Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n!—first born,
Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam,
May I express thee unblam'd?"—*Book* 3.

"O! for that warning voice, which he who saw
Th' Apocalypse heard cry in Heav'n aloud!"—*Book* 4.

"Now morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl."—*Book* 5.

If Milton had considered this abbreviation as a barbarity in poetic discipline, would he have thus

exhibited it in the very van of his armies? A beautiful passage in the 4th book, has a line in which it is twice abbreviated:

——————————"The sun
Declin'd, was hasting now, with prone career,
To th' eastern isles, and in th' ascending scale
Of Heav'n, the stars that usher evening rose."

LETTER XLIV.

The Rev. Dr Warner.

Lichfield, Oct. 25, ——.

It delights me that you and Mr Hayley have the happiness of each others acquaintance. May the friendship between you be eternal! My heart glows to behold all the friends I love bound each to each in the golden chain of amity; the links of which must be indissoluble when formed by congenial ability, and by kindred worth:—yet, at this instant, is my heart smote by the sudden recollection of having seen noble hearts disunited by fatal misconstruction and character ill-understood. This consciousness reminds me that the word *generally* ought to have been prefixed, to

render the proud word *indissoluble* more consonant to the instability of mortal natures. Leaving axioms, then, and modestly exchanging the *must* for the *may*, let me express my fervent wish that you may always enjoy Mr Hayley's esteem and warm attachment!—Distinctions greater, in my estimation, than monarchs have it in their power to bestow, even without excepting my favourite Joseph, and his amiable brother, the Duke of Tuscany.

Every author has a right to reject alterations of his work, made by others, if they do not meet his approbation. The pains I took with the poem you brought me, the Triumphs of Benevolence, were taken solely to oblige you; and I have no mortification from seeing them rejected. I invariably felt that, after the best that could be done for it, speedy oblivion must be its portion: —the fate of every poem when there exists another, upon the same subject, of decided and infinite superiority. Nay, without such an undoing comparison, the paucity of its ideas involve "a natural alacrity at sinking."

Mr Howard's warm opposition to your plan is what I expected. As he is abroad, I hoped it might not reach his ear till afte. its accomplishment. Officious information has precluded that hope, and his reluctance on the subject will throw

great difficulty in your way, in the prosecution of a design, which is truly praise-worthy, let evangelic modesty oppose it as it may.

You might boldly plead one essential argument in favour of your design to him by whose virtues it was excited. The statue is not erected with a presumptuous hope to reward exertions that are above all human reward, but to bend the universal passion, the love of fame, upon its noblest object, philanthrophy.

Thank you for the translation of those pages in Boccacio, which mention the plague at Florence. The account is awful—it is terrible; but the traits of that dire calamity being there chiefly general ones, it is less interesting than the poor Sadler's history of the last great calamity in London.

"When dreadful Plague, o'er London's gasping crowds
Shook her dank wing, and steer'd her murky clouds;
When o'er the friendless bier no rites were read,
No dirge slow chanted, and no pall outspread;
When Death, and Night, pil'd up the naked throng,
And Silence drove their ebon cars along *."

The Sadler's history of that terrible period, may by no means vie with your translation in the ac-

* These lines are from a very fine manuscript poem, expected shortly to pass the press, by Dr D—— of Derby, 1786.—S.

curacy and grace of language, but the soul-harrowing horrors are, on his simple undignified page, in all their strength, and all their pathos.

This direst of human visitations, with its afflicting particulars, ought to be impressed on every mind. Salutary are the lessons taught by these ghastly images. Do they not cry aloud—"Look at us, ye that murmur at common evils, and pour out your hearts in gratitude for the mercies of exemption!"

It has just struck me, from the duplicity and vanity with which you tell me the unknown author of the Triumphs of Benevolence has manœuvred in his concealed correspondence with you on this subject, that P——, with assistance, may be this yet unknown author.

I verily believe it will prove so; and if it should, I shall smile at having been drawn in, once again, to employ myself in washing the face of his poetry.—O! that Longinus and yourself could ever, for a moment, suppose me the mother of one of those rhyming abortions, which a meretricious and coarse ingenuity is continually begetting upon his mummy brain! I am now more than ever rejoiced that my lotion was rejected—regretting nothing but the time we lost in preparing it. Time, that might have been devoted to pleasanter themes; transferred from the attempt of this in-

competent panegyrist, to discussing more particulars concerning the Christian hero himself,

"The summer's day too short for *such* a subject."

LETTER XLV.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 27, 1786.

I AM surprised at your idea, that Milton's sonnets have a singular flow of numbers, and that their author thought smoothness an essential perfection in that order of verse. The best of Milton's have certain hardnesses, though there is a majesty, perhaps, in that very hardness, which, besides producing an enchanting effect for the intermixture of the musical lines, seems to mark the peculiarity of the composition, and makes the sonnet, and its privileges, stand apart from all other writing in measure.

To the pointed and craggy rock, the grace of which is its roughness, I should as soon think of applying the epithet *polished*, as smoothness of numbers to the sonnets of Milton.

Now, seeming to allow the privilege of mutilating the vowel *e* in blank verse, you assert that it ought never to be done in rhyme. We perpetually see it mutilated, however, in our noblest rhyming compositions, without the least injury to the grandeur and beauty of the verse. Certainly the longer the line, the less is the possibility of injuring its melody by cutting off the pronunciation of that vowel. The musical Pope, in the most exquisitely polished of all his ever-highly-polished verse, the Eloisa to Abelard, curtails it twice in one line.

"How love th' offender, yet detest th' offence."

The *e* twice taken away does, perhaps, injure the melody of that line; but there is another of Pope's, from the Temple of Fame, whose sweetness has no superior, though it contains an abridged *e*.

"And on th' impassive ice the lightnings play."

The accurate, the finished Gray, continually takes this liberty, because he felt that it may be taken with poetic impunity; instance,

"Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse."

And, again,

" One morn I miss'd him on th' accustom'd hill."

And also,

" Th' unconquerable mind, and Freedom's holy flame."

Even in his short lyric measure;

" Isles that crown th' Ægean deep."

Also,

" The secrets of th' abyss to spy."

And,

" Who th' avenger of his guilt."

Milton, in every species of measure, whether long or short, scruples not this abridgement, nor the frequency of its use, and this in his rhyme as well as in his blank verse. Examination will shew you this. So dissolves your fastidious maxim in the warm rays of high poetic authorities.

Dr Johnson was a very indifferent reader of verse. One eternal monotone frustrated the intent of the poet, respecting the echo of sound to sense. Thus has he taught modern critics to think, that the line Pope gave as an example of

quick motion, yet of perfect smoothness, is, in reality, an harsh and dragging verse.

" Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main."

But if the voice dwells, as it ought, in recitation, upon the words *flies* and *skims*, the exact effect is produced, that Pope intended; it becomes the smoothest possible line, and presents an admirable picture to the ear, not only of a light swift nymph, but of a bird on quick though unwinnowing pinion,

" Fli-es o'er th' unbending corn, and ski-ms along the main."

By mutilating the *e* in this line, see how Pope dissented from your maxim combated above.

Nor must I suffer you to take from me my favourite word *inspirit*; because not your brilliant worship's vocabulary, which you will call the whole English language, can supply its place—*animate* will not, since, besides that it is equally of foreign extraction, to animate is to give life, to inspirit is to give soul.

You have a verbal queasiness about you, which amounts to disease. I hope you like that elegant word. Upon incontrovertible authority have I set a little dozen words upon their joint stools in the poetic fane, which you have attempted to kick

down stairs; but I trust they will maintain their station.

From the extracts I sent you, you have, by this time, received proof, that I did not call Addison's serious prose a water-gruel style, without having found it so, at least in some instances. Nothing wearies me like prosing about and about the good cardinal virtues in their old rôbes; but I like to see them glittering in the bright armour of Johnsonian eloquence.

Addison always appeared to me as tautological in his solemn prose as in his verse, when he says,

> "So the pure limpid stream, when foul'd by stains
> Of rushing torrents, and descending rains,
> Works itself clear, and as it runs refines."

There can be no partiality in my boundless preference of Johnson's style, as a moral essayist, to Addison's. I am ready to confess the superiority of the latter in playful composition. Addison died before I was born, and Johnson hated me; against whose writings am I most likely to be prejudiced? But, in truth, I never suffer either personal affection, or dislike, to operate upon what I read. So if, as you insinuate respecting

* What an anti-climax!—S.

these two celebrated authors, I am blind to excellence, and feel myself fired with rapturous approbation where no excellence is, the defect lies in my taste, and in my judgment.

Your wit runs strangely away with you in criticizing poetry, or surely you would feel the happiness of Mr Hayley's simile for the fine luxuriances of genius, lopt away by criticism, when he compares them to Sampson shorn by Dalilah, of his strength-giving tresses. Similies are not expected to be minutely exact; it is enough, if the general resemblance is striking.

That author did not mean that time had made the frolic compositions of Chaucer *heavy* as lead—he uses not the word, but says "dark as lead." Time, rendering their language obsolete, may well be allowed to have made that metal dim, or dark as lead, that once was brilliant as steel and gold.

And what!—is Hayley's illustration of the bounds which prejudice affixes to genius, by an allusion to the pillars of Hercules, supposed, by the ancients, to fix the limits of the world; is that too sublime for your comprehension*? You!

* The three passages alluded to are in Hayley's Epistles on Epic Poetry.—*S.*

the classical, the learned! "And who's blind now Mamma, the urchin cried."

I could dissect many of Milton's sublimest passages, place their imagery and phrases in a ridiculous point of view, with the same ease that prejudice against the moderns induces you to ridicule fine passages in Mason and Hayley, and that envy induced Johnson so to criticise the beauties of Milton, Prior, Gray, &c. &c. Behold a mirror to such critical sophistries.

> "Soon as they forth were come to open sight
> Of day-spring, and the Sun, who scarce uprisen,
> With wheels yet hovering o'er the ocean brim,
> Shot parallel to th' earth his dewy ray."
>
> *Paradise Lost, Book 5.*

When we place the sun in a chariot, we may mention its wheels; but personifying the sun as the word *his* implies, and arising from slumber, we must not give him wheels instead of legs.

> ——————"And the thunder,
> Wing'd with red lightning, and impetuous rage,
> Perhaps has spent its shafts, and ceases now
> To bellow through the vast and boundless deep."

Natural history is here violated; the properties of lightning are transferred to the mere noise made by its explosion. Thunder is in itself in-

noxious; and, after all, this dread instrument of Jehova's wrath is turned into a bull and *bellows*.

But O! while I thus transform myself into one of those unfeeling critics, of whom my spirit is so impatient, how sincerely do I abjure such sickly accuracy; like that by which you were jaundiced in your strictures on the beauteous extracts I sent you from Mason and Hayley. A nervous and manly understanding ought to shake such verbal prudery to air, as "the lion shakes the dew-drop from his mane."

LETTER XLVI.

Miss Powys.

Lichfield, Nov. 10, 1786.

It was time to abandon your beloved retreat on the ocean's edge, spite of all the elegant comforts with which it has been invested by your active ingenuity.

> ——— "Now winter's turbid seas
> Dash round the rocks, and dark the tempests lour,
> And mourn the winds along the lonely shore."

Friendship, the heart's precious treasure, time wrests from us by various means—by the most awful and irreversible, have I lost another object of my regard. Humane and gentle, tender and attentive to all that could affect my peace, did I ever find Dr Knowles, who lately fell a victim to the duties of his profession. No medicine was found of power to expel the putrid venom from his frame, whose prescriptions had rescued so many from the grave.

Without the lustres of genius, or of that ignis-fatuus wit, his intellects had strength and clearness: his strict piety no shade of moroseness, and the kindness of his heart tempered a very inflexible sincerity. I must long regret the loss of such a friend.

Have you heard of the good fortune of that ingenious French lady, to whom we are indebted for Caroline de Litchfield? Doubtless you have read and admired that beautiful work. Gratitude for literary pleasures always interests good hearts, in the destiny of those who have bestowed them; therefore, I am sure you will be glad to learn, that the author of Caroline is indebted to the merits and graces of those volumes, for a transition from incompetence to the comforts of wealth; from the unprotected dependence

of waning virginity to the social pleasures of wedded friendship. A rich widower, of fifty-three, on the confines of Germany, respectable in rank and character, whose children are married, and settled at distance from him, read that novel, and felt its excellence. Personally unknown to the author, he inquired into her situation, and found her merits acknowledged, her reputation spotless. He had the good sense to believe, that the acquisition of a companion for life, whose talents and sensibility had produced that work, would prove a surer source of happiness to his remaining years than youth, which, with her, was past; than beauty, which she had never possessed. He has married her. The instance is rare, Hymen, passing by the fane of Cytherea and Plutus's shrine, to light his torch at the altars of genius.

Adieu!

LETTER XLVII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Nov. 15, 1786.

BE assured I will write to you as often as I can, without shameful neglect of my old friends.

More than this you have too much generosity to desire. There are circumstances which swallow up my leisure, for which you would pity me. Amongst that number is the being presented from their authors, with most of the fustian and vapid compositions in rhyme, which disgrace our press, from the nauseous writings of puffing Pratt, through the ranks of his kindred spirits. When these *musifying* hashes are set before us, there is no helping nibbling; the very sight of them makes us hungry after absurdity, though sure that the stuff will make us extremely sick.

But let me reply to the strictures of your last packet. Great Justice, thou art my Goddess.—I renounce all criticism, whose scales are not held by thee. You admire the beautiful verbal darings of Shakespeare, yet will not allow them as authorities in modern composition.

Fy! that is tyranny! You certainly have not studied poetic composition scientifically, though you may perhaps systematically, or you could not be desirous of abridging its vocabulary. Infinite is the importance of possessing a number of synonymous expressions, various in their accent, and various in their quantity. Shakespeare felt this, and boldly and nobly assumed the privilege of verbal creation. You are injurious to

the interests of the poetic science, when you wish annihilation to so precious, so useful a creation.

Now, as to your prejudices against the style of Johnson, which you possess in common with two more men of genius, who are of my correspondence. You have said great writers have great faults, and often write extremely ill. Nothing can be more true; and who oftener writes ill than Shakespeare? But let me observe, that nothing can be less fair, than to produce a turgid, or any way ill-written passage from a great writer, and, by its defects, pronounce upon his general style. I am not blind to the Johnsonian turgidities, and find them, now and then, extremely ridiculous. What of that? They, like the bombast of Shakespeare, are but spots in the sun. Where they do not arise, and they are far from arising frequently, strength, grace, and harmony, combine to render his prose what the world has at length pronounced it, the most perfect example of eloquent writing.

Voltaire has done by Shakespeare exactly what you do by Johnson: repeated passages, which are essentially absurd, and others, which are rendered absurd by his own misconception of their sense, and then triumphed over the supposed bad taste of the English in admiring such fustian.

Is it possible you can ask me who they are that consider Johnson as a fine writer? My stars! what a question! Was ever any man's literary fame more splendid and universal? Are not the vices of his envy and malevolence hid in the blaze of his genius! Why, but on account of his superior eloquence, do the epithets *great* and *illustrious* so constantly precede his name? Many men have been more learned, many more virtuous, but few indeed so eloquent.

The enormous injustice of asserting that Shakespeare only had a right to enter the chaos of verbal combinations, for the purpose of extending the poetic privileges, and that its gates ought to be shut, after having admitted his writings, astonishes me in a man of sense, and in a whig, exclusive privileges being the very corner-stone of toryism. There is toryism in science as well as in government. I have not been accustomed to give my mind political hectics. Unable to serve my country, I have turned my contemplation upon pleasanter themes; but the whig principles, on their broad and general basis, that of claiming for all men what is granted to some, have invariably been mine.

When you not only declaim upon the right of exclusive privileges for Shakespeare, but insist upon a magical establishment for them, there is

an end of all fair argument. Beauty is the only magic of Shakespeare's expressions,—beauty, which often resulted *equally* from his novel, and happy epithets, and from the daring liberties he took with our language, as from the ideas upon which they threw their striking colouring; and he has assuredly bequeathed to his successors the right of wearing his cestus. There is no spell, even in Shakespeare's name, which can give beauty to that which is not genuinely beautiful. When he says

> ———" Here lies Duncan,
> His silver skin laced with his golden blood:"

We exclaim, execrable! But when he says

> " The glow-worm shews the morning to be near,
> And 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire;"

We cry out beautiful! If the change of the adjective *pale* into a verb active had not been happy, we should be as free to despise it as to despise *silver* skin laced with *gold* blood; but it is illiberal to feel any expression to be fortunate, and not allow it to be authority. I pray you turn not such a tory in the chair of criticism.

LETTER XLVIII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 10, 1786.

INCONCEIVABLE! that a gentleman, who himself writes poetry, with original spirit, and easy grace, can so reply to the extracts * I sent him from a beautiful, though yet unpublished poem; novel as to subject, polished and harmonious in its numbers, and rich, even to luxuriance, in that faculty which transfers to the pen the powers of the pencil; adapting, with yet unknown skill, and unattained happiness, philosophic science, and mechanic art, to the sportive warblings of the lyre! That a kindred spirit, which, being determined against publication, can have no warp from rival-hating envy, should turn with cold and sickly taste from such a banquet!—I must again exclaim, inconceivable!

You tell me the author is too much an epithet-monger to hit your taste. You must, perforce, al-

* From Dr Darwin's Botanic Garden. It has been since published, and obtained very great celebrity.—S.

low, that epithets are the poet's colours, and that he can bring nothing to the *eye*, without a liberal use of them. When used merely to eke out the measure, without adding strength to the sense, or life to the image, they are superfluous and despicable; but not of that order are those of the Botanic Garden.

You bid me look at Shakespeare and Milton. I am familiar with their writings. When they mean to describe, they use as many epithets as Mason, or the author of the extracts I sent you, or as any other good poet of the present day; and of the compound epithet they are much more lavish. More frequently, also, than any modern, do they give us several epithets, in climatic succession, to a single substantive. Conversational poetry may be impressive, pathetic, and interesting, with a very sparing use of epithets; but descriptive poetry must abundantly have them, or it can, as was observed before, bring nothing to the eye of the reader. The Botanic Garden is a professedly descriptive composition. Lavish as are its epithets, many of them we find original, and all appropriate. Let us examine if Shakespeare and Milton are less lavish of them when imagery or scenery is their theme. First for the bard of Avon,

" So are those *crispy, snaky, golden* locks,
That make such *wanton* gambols in the wind."

" Thy *turfy* mountains where live *nibbling* sheep,
Thy *flat* meads, thick with clover for their food,
Thy banks with *pioned* and *tillied* brims,
Which *spongy* April, at thy best bedecks,
To make *cold* nymphs *chaste* crowns."

" The seasons alter, *hoary-headed* frosts
Fall in the *fresh* lap of the *damask* rose,
And on old Hyem's *chan* and *icy* crown,
An *odorous* chaplet of *sweet summer* buds
Is, as in mockery, set."

" By *paved* fountain, and by *rushy* brook,
Or on the *beached* margent of the sea."

" E'en till the eastern gate, all *fiery red*,
Opening on Neptune with *fair blessed* beams,
Turns into *yellow* gold his *salt green* streams."

———" I warrant you
The *white, cold, virgin* snow upon my heart
Abates the ardour of my liver."

This even in common dramatic dialogue. And it is worth observation, that even the agitated state of Claudio's mind, at the time he makes the ensuing speech, does not prevent his using epithets lavishly. They are dictated by passion itself, if that passion wishes to give pathetic pictures of the evils it dreads.

——" Ay! but to die,
To lie forgotten in the *silent* grave,
This *sensible warm* motion to become
A *kneaded* clod, and the *delighted* spirit
To bathe in *fiery* floods, or to reside
In *thrilling* regions of *thick-ribbed* ice;
To be imprison'd in the *viewless* winds,
Or blown with *restless* violence about
The *pendant* world!"

" Three *glorious* suns, each one a *perfect* sun,
Not separated with the *racking* clouds,
But sever'd in a *pale clear-shining* sky."

Shew me passages, if you can, in a modern poet, more liberal of epithets than the above verses selected from Shakespeare. Let us look at Milton.

——" His *ponderous* shield,
Ethereal temper, *massy*, *large*, and *round*
Behind him cast."—

Five epithets in one line and half.

" Now to th' ascent of that *steep savage* hill
Satan had journied on, *pensive*, and *slow*."

——" Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the muses haunt
Clear spring, or *shady* grove, or *sunny* hill."

——" As when Heaven's fire
Has scath'd the forest oaks, or mountain pines,
With *singed* top their *stately* growth, tho' *bare*,
Stands on the *blasted* heath."

" Ye vallies *low*, that the *mild* whispers use
Of shades, and *wanton* winds, and *gushing* brooks,
On whose *fresh* lap the *swart* star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your *quaint enamelled* eyes,
That on the *green* turf suck the *honied* showers,
And purple all the ground with *vernal* flowers."

But the day and night would fail me in citing instances on this subject. They swarm through the writings of Shakespeare and Milton. Take away the epithets from any of the passages, and see how indistinct the descriptions, images, and landscapes become!

You cannot dislike make-weight epithets more than I do. Had you called Pratt an epithet-monger, you had given him his proper title, who gives the following line in seven times repetition through the course of five pages:

" O *weak*, O *frail*, O *poor* mortality."

You tell me that you dislike in my poem, Louisa, the first adjective of the ensuing couplet,

" Lighted with *arrowy* beams the ocean caves,
And sunk with splendour in th' illumin'd waves."

It has always been my endeavour to paint from nature, rather than to copy from books, in my poetic landscapes; and I have often observed,

that, when caves are penetrated with light, it is shot into them in pointed rays, for which *arrowy* is a picturesque epithet. I confess it is of my own coinage; but I flatter myself it was not coined unhappily. Its original appearance in English verse will, I believe, be found in my Elegy on Captain Cook, published first in the year 1780*. It has met with very flattering adoption in the subsequent works of superior poets.

I cannot conclude my letter without adding one more observation respecting the reason you allege for your strange scorn of the extracts from the Botanic Garden. If you will not grant that I have demonstrated your mistake about Shakespeare and Milton being more sparing of the adjective than the best modern poets, I beg we may speak no more to each other on classical subjects, since we shall certainly agree no better on poetic claims, rights, usages, &c. than Archbishop Laud and Hampden would on political ones, were they to talk them over in Elysium. It hectics me, painfully to see an understanding of high endowment thus unjust to contemporary abilities—to find the "mole's dim curtain," where I expected to have met the "lynx's beam." Adieu.

* This word is not new, but may be found in Milton and Gray.

LETTER XLIX.

Mr W. Newton.

Lichfield, Dec. 17, 1786.

Yet too agitated to employ my pen on indifferent subjects, it is to such friends as yourself only that I am capable of writing. You who have long known and loved my poor father; you who are so kindly interested in my feelings, and in my destiny; it is you whom I wish to address in hours like these, when my mind is, as the subsiding sea, still trembling from the storm.

You are aware by how slight a thread the life of my aged nursling has been long suspended. His drop into the grave is an event which, I fear, will baffle my resolution to sustain with the cheerful resignation which reason and religion dictate. That entire dependence upon my care and attention, resulting from the decay of his corporeal and intellectual faculties, has doubled our bond of union, and engrafted the maternal upon filial tenderness. He seems at once my parent and my child; nor shall I suffer less, perhaps even more, from the loss of him, than if he had died while

power, and authority, and exertion were in his hands.

He had been several weeks exempt from those sudden seizures of apparently mortal torpidity, which often put his existence into the extremest peril. Last Sunday morning, I was roused from my slumbers, between seven and eight, by these alarming words from my servant: "Madam, my master is very ill. He was seized, a few minutes ago, in a different way from what he used to be, with a dreadful fit. You had better not go to him. We have sent for Dr Jones."

You will suppose I was not to be restrained from a sight which, God knows, I was not able to endure without agony. That dear feeble frame, and venerable face, which I had often seen sunk in the stupor of apoplectic palsy, torn and distorted by convulsive and apparently agonized struggles!

Ere I had been ten minutes in the room, his physician entered, and pronounced the seizure epileptic. He said he should bleed him copiously, not with the least hope that he could now be rescued from death; but to prevent the continuance of the fits, and render his expiring moments calm and easy; adding, he has not strength to bear the loss of blood, which is necessary to subdue

these convulsed struggles; but if not subdued, they would be inevitably fatal.

The loss of blood *did* subdue the fits, of which he had no return; but sunk into cold, damp, and, in appearance, deadly slumber. The physician said he would pass away in those slumbers; and assured me that he had little more to suffer.

I asked why it might not be hoped that he, who had survived apoplexy and palsy so often, might survive this new and more terrible attack? It was replied, that when epilepsy seizes, after a succession of other dangerous diseases, and after years of previous debility, there had been scarce an instance where it had not been speedily fatal; that it would, however, be right to make every effort to save while breath remained; that a coffee-cup of madeira should be poured down his throat every half hour, the capability of swallowing being lost; that nothing more could be done; that medicine was useless; that he might expire in a few minutes, or might continue some hours; but I was intreated not to entertain a certainly fallacious hope. Dr Jones added, "I am obliged to go out of town directly, nor can I be of any farther use."

Alas! what a day of desponding anguish did I pass by his bed-side! that bed, on which he lay stretched out, his legs, and feet, and hands, icy cold;

his eyes closed;—the damp of death on his sunk temples;—a breathing corpse!—but he had no struggles; that was some comfort. The wine we punctually administered each half hour, without his seeming sensible of its being poured down. I expected every breath would be his last. In this state he remained from the time of his being bled, between eight and nine in the morning, till two hours after midnight.

Totally exhausted by the ceaseless tears I had shed, I was persuaded by my servants to go to bed, upon their promise of giving the wine at the appointed intervals.

With all the sorrow which, I think, filial affection knows to feel, I took what I believed my everlasting leave; kissing repeatedly his cold lips and hands. Assured by every body around me, that he could not live till day-break, I bid them avoid coming to me till I rung, and desired that when they saw me, I might learn the event rather from their silence, than their words.

So many hours weeping procured a friendly stupor on pressing my pillow. I fell into an heavy desponding slumber, nor awoke till the clock struck six. Then, with a deep sense of woe, did I open my swoln eye-lids. Darkness and silence were around me, and the sense of deprivation sat

heavy on my heart. Never more! said I aloud, never more!

During an whole hour I had not resolution to ring my bell for the fatal information. At length, and without any summons, I heard the sound of quick steps approaching my door. Strange, thought I, and unfeeling speed!—they have surely forgotten my injunctions. I lifted the drop-bolt. "Madam, my master is alive, and much better—he has spoken—he has asked for you, and for his breakfast."

Up I started, and, huddling on a slight covering, hastened down to his apartment, my heart bounding to my very throat. O Friend,

> "Not thro' the arch so hurries the blown tide
> As I, recomforted, did pass that door."

The door, which I never again expected to open with the gladness of filial hope.—Yes, I beheld that beloved father, sitting nearly upright in his bed, supported by a back-chair, his eyes open, and a portion of intelligence, with a look of tender affection, lighting them up once more.

"My dear Nancy, said he, in a faint voice, I am glad you are come to give me my breakfast. I feel hungry." O! what tears of transport did

I pour on that extended hand, once more warm with life! with what unutterable delight did I lift the tea, and bits of toast to his lips!

When he had eaten his breakfast with liking and appetite, and was laid down again to dose, I learnt the particulars of this miraculous revival. His attendants said that he remained, in the state in which I left him, till between five and six, when, on giving him the wine, they perceived he swallowed it, though without moving his limbs, or opening his eyes. On repeating it, the next half hour, he expressed unwillingness to take it, and, lifting up his hand, tried to push it from him. However they persuaded, or rather half-forced him to take it. On the next attempt of that sort he opened his eyes, and said, with tolerable distinctness,—"No, no, not wine—tea, and bread and butter;"—but they now, without attempting force, persuaded him to drink the wine, assuring him that he should have his breakfast the instant it could be procured. One of them ran up in that moment to impart the glad tidings to me.

He has continued slowly to amend from that time. His appetite is returned, and he sits up some hours every day in his arm-chair, and can converse a little himself, with some wanderings, that shew impaired memory rather than deranged intellect. He attends with pleasure to what we

say, and read, to amuse him. I am happier than I can express, though it is an apprehensive and tremulous delight.

But my friend, what a resurrection at seventy-eight! Dr Jones is astonished, and says he shall never again despair while he sees a patient respire.

My thankfulness to that heaven, which has thus restored to my fond cares their thrice dear object, is boundless. O! that it may long be mine to screen his helpless age from every want, and every annoyance!

There is exquisite pathos in the just, though melancholy light in which you place the disadvantage of possessing a mind refined and exalted; so far beyond the class of beings with whom it is your fate to live. I wish that you had in your vicinity two or three friends, who could value your talents, and partake your sentiments,

> "Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
> With whom you might converse, and by the fire
> Help waste the sullen day."

But as at present this must not be, I conjure you to avoid, as much as possible, fruitless longings, and to reflect that it may not be always thus;—that, by the cultivation of your naturally fine ta-

lents, by the ideas your industry is every day accumulating from those silent, but unfailing friends, your books; you are laying up a stock of information, knowledge, science, and reasoning powers, which may one day render you the delight of people who shall better know and feel your value. Even should this never happen, should your expansive and expanded mind fade, as it has bloomed, in an intellectual desert, it cannot but be grateful in the sight of him, who endowed your spirit with uncommon gifts, that no indolence, or neglect on your part have rendered his bounty vain. And since you have added piety, and moral virtue, to mental industry, be assured that you have increased in your immortal soul its capacity of happiness against its entrance into that house, in which there are many mansions, and where, though all who are admitted shall be happy; there will be in that happiness very wide degrees.

Thank you for your mineral intelligence, unwelcome as in itself it proves. The value of Eyam living to my father, once near 700l. per annum, is not now more than 150l. So sink deeper and deeper, from year to year, our golden hopes in this watery mischief. Adieu!

LETTER L.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 20, 1786.

I SEE you are displeased with me, for the perhaps too ingenuous manner in which I have combated the prejudices that govern your criticisms. You say I want temper in argument. It certainly exhausts my patience to see a man of ability, with an air of unappealable decision, perpetually pronouncing in *modern* poets *that* to be obscure, which is clear as day-light; if the language is elevated, calling it stiff and stilted; while, if simplicity be the character of the passage, he terms it heavy, mean, and prosaic.

In your observations upon Mason's, Hayley's, the Bard of Derby's, and even upon my much inferior compositions, I cannot guess at the ideas which stimulate your censure, or inspire your praise; because the passages you commend, in our separate writings, appear to me no way superior to those you condemn.

I am still sure of the fact, that where Milton

and Shakespeare mean to describe, they use epithets quite as lavishly as our best moderns*. The passages you quote to oppose my assertion are merely colloquial and narrative.

It would be a fine opiate truly to read a descriptive poem, in which the author should talk of hills, and vallies, and rocks, and seas, and streams, and youths, and nymphs, without giving us the picturesque noun-adjective, which alone conveys to us any distinct idea, what sort of hill, and valley, rock, ocean, stream, youth, or maid, he means to place before us.

I was reading Henry the sixth yesterday, without any design of searching for added instances to prove a truth so self-evident, as that picture and appropriation in general depend upon the epithet. That is not one of Shakespeare's best plays, and though generally natural, and therefore interesting, though it contains much good sense, and strong characteristic strokes, it has certainly less poetry than most of his other dramas; yet in the poetic, or even in the impassioned passages, mark how the epithets pour in!

——— "Wizards know their time,
Deep night, *dark* night, the *silent* of the night."

* "So also does Homer, whether viewed in his Grecian, or English dress."—*S.*

See how the great poet depends upon the thrice-repeated epithets to produce a growing impression of horror!

— — — — — —

"Oft have I seen a *timely-parted* ghost,
Of *ashy* semblance, *meagre, pale*, and *bloodless*."

"The *gaudy, babbling*, and *remorseful* day
Is crept into the bosom of the sea;
And now *loud-howling* wolves arouse the jades
That drag the *tragic melancholy* night;
Who, with their *drowsy, slow*, and *flagging* wing,
Clip dead-men's graves, and from their *misty* jaws
Breathe *foul contagious* darkness in the air."

Milton, as well as Shakespeare, sometimes produces a beautiful effect, by placing his substantive in the midst of epithets, thus:

———"Now is the *pleasant* time,
The *cool*, the *silent*."

And again,

"Save what the glimmering of these *livid* flames,
Casts *pale*, and *dreadful*."

That extremely sublime character of Richard III. given by his mother, consists wholly of epithets.

"Tetchy, and wayward, was thine infancy,
Thy school-days frightful, desperate, wild, and furious,
Thy prime of manhood, daring, bold, and venturous,
Thine age confirm'd, proud, subtle, sly, and bloody."

Some of these epithets may be deemed exuberant, from having meanings too kindred—but it is natural for the embittered and accusing spirit to pour them from the lip, regardless of tautology—and on the whole it is an heart-striking summary of a villain's life.

You seem to think my writings infected by the affectation of using uncommon words. I hope not; but I choose, and always shall choose the strongest which spontaneously occur, to express my idea, whether in prose or verse, if the idea is elevated; mindless whether they do, or do not form a part of the fashionable vocabulary of Lord Fillagree and Lady Pamtickle. When I converse in such circles I stoop my style to their level, but I *write* for other kind of persons.

As to my Louisa Epistles, they, however inferior, are professedly on the level of Pope's Epistle from Eloisa. None have a right to say that any passage, or epithet of mine in that work is too elevated for the epistolary style, if it is not more above that level than is Pope's epistle.

You observe to me that you correspond with many whose hearts are as ingenuous as mine, and

whose abilities are as brilliant. Respecting the latter, instead of *as*, you might doubtless have used the word *more*. These, you say, think entirely with you upon the insufficiency of Mason and Hayley to be styled fine poets, and upon that of Johnson's claim to eloquence.

With such, a literary correspondence must be as mutually pleasant, as it proves the reverse between you and me; since however impossible that any two people should see every object in the same light, yet a great degree of parity in taste, and in ideas of every kind, is necessary to make such an intercourse desirable. It was vain to hope for this parity between a fastidious Wit, and a glowing Enthusiast.

I know you do me honour in giving yourself the trouble to reform what strikes you as defective in my own writings, and as erroneous judgment on the composition of others;—but, differing so materially about the component parts of a receipt for making beautiful style, I am not likely to improve by your corrections. You are in high life, I am in obscurity, from which I do not wish to emerge, since peace is dearer to me than distinction. Our acquaintance is not in common, therefore anecdote can seldom be interesting. Why therefore should we pursue our correspondence? I shall be happier in giving my epistolary leisure to friends

whose more congenial tastes ensure a warm welcome to all my communications, than to you, who are so often disgusted with my style both in prose and verse, especially since I cannot wish to slacken its nerves, because it is *naturally* energetic; and to become light, it must be light by affectation.

Suffer me, then, to bid you a long adieu, with a grateful sense of your desire to have instructed, and of the great amusement your wit afforded me, ere my relish of frolic humour was lost in the gloom of a Parent's death-bed.—He yet lives—but I must lose him soon if I live myself. Think of me as a friend, who will always sincerely, and warmly wish your happiness, and pursue, with a distant, but gladdened eye, your bright track of public fame and emolument. My peace requires that I should not be of your correspondence. When you took me up, the measure of mine was so full, that I should neglect all those who have prior claims upon my attention, ere I could answer your letters with any sort of precision. Pain would be attached to the consciousness that beneath your astonishing facility, or plenitude of leisure, my replies must prove

> "But as the morn-dew on the myrtle leaf
> To your large sea."

LETTER LI.

MISS WESTON.

Lichfield, Dec. 23, 1786.

ONE of the oldest, and dearest of my friends, Mrs Mompessan, is coming to me soon. My heart feels gladdened by that consciousness. She is so cheerful, and her mind is so enriched with useful, interesting, and amusing information, that to delight in her society it is not even necessary to love her;—but to converse with her often, and not to love her, it is very necessary that Nature should have given a dose of opium to the affections.

You know my dear father's late imminent danger, and my sufferings on his account, from my letter to Mr Whalley, sent to Ludlow for your perusal. He continues to amend, though slowly.

I have not yet been lucky enough to meet with Robertson's History, and I did not read Marmontel's Incas, till after I had read Helen's Poem, Peru. On perusing the former, I confess it struck me that the author of the latter might have improved her composition, had she adopted, from

Marmontel, that closeness of plan, in which he is more happy than herself. The general fault of Peru, is, that it seems rather a string of episodes, than a regular series of events, which produced an important revolution of empire. Had the chain of action been more distinctly perceived, and had one Peruvian hero been so much exalted above the rest, as to have appeared the leading character, it would then have been no objection, but an advantage to her poem, that the history had been told in prose before she told it in verse. Numbers so rich and harmonious; scenery so vivid and beautiful; and imagery so well brought to the eye, must have given her work inevitable pre-eminence over any prose descriptions, however elegant and striking. It is the inferiority in point of interest, resulting from a too diffuse spirit of description, where she had better have been dramatic, which turns the balance against her, and in favour of Marmontel.

When I read the Incas, I so strongly felt the possibility of forming a fine epic poem on that story, by following Marmontel's lead in the events and characters, by giving them dramatic energy, and by illustrating them from other sources, by simile, metaphor, and allusion; and by super-adding the picturesque and scenic graces, that I think I should instantly have made the attempt, but for

a consiousness that it must wear an invidious appearance to Miss Williams, and imply a vain, and probably groundless idea of possessing superior powers to hers. Where she has failed in her epic attempt, it was not from want of genius, but of that critical judgment, incompatible with her youth and inexperience.

It is well that I was thus restrained from beginning a work, in which I should not have had leisure to proceed. By want of leisure alone was I compelled to lay aside Telemachus. If I had finished, and made that poem a good one, it would eventually have been no disadvantage, but the contrary, that Fenelon had told the story agreeably in prose. I say *eventually*, for, if I should complete and publish that work, I should know that an inundation of immediate sarcasm, proceeding from the pens of countless unsuccessful poetasters, would flow through the reviews, magazines, and newspapers, on what they would term the presumption of attempting to excel the composition of Fenelon. But that story is much better calculated for verse, than prose.

I am, however, well aware that the celebrity of fine rhythm is of much slower growth than that of agreeable prose;—but, once established, the poetic influence becomes much more powerful, and, in the end, even more universal. The letters

in prose, between Abelard and Eloisa, are finely written, and warranted original;—yet are they not an hundredth part so often read as Pope's beautiful epistle, in which he has involved the most striking sentiments and descriptions contained in the whole of those mutual letters. The reverse would happen, for a course of time, were those letters, and the rhyme translation to appear at the same period, and were each of them new to the curiosity of the Public.

That partial, and limited taste for poetic writing, which you, Sophia, profess, is an arcanum of the understanding, into which I cannot penetrate. From sense and reason, it appears to me utterly unaccountable. I must therefore conclude it a prejudice. All prejudices are unworthy a cultivated mind. Your's extends to the names of compositions; my correspondent, Mr ——'s, to the names of authors. You shut your eyes against the beauties of sentiment, imagery, satire, and landscape, if they appear before you in the lyric, or sonnet measure.

To become superior to this prejudice, you have only to reflect that all the various orders of rhythm, as blank verse, the couplet, the lyric, which is the ode stanza, the elegiac, and the sonnet, are, to all which constitutes genuine poetic excellence, but as the riding-habit, the Italian night-gown,

the levee and the court dress, are to a fine young woman. Has she beauty and grace, though we may prefer one dress, and think it more becoming than another, it is not in any of them to annihilate the elegance of her form, the glow of her complexion, the symmetry of her features, or the expression of her countenance. So in poetic composition, are lovely, or terrible objects strongly brought to the eye?—are the metaphors, similes, and allusions, ingenious and happy?—does the sentiment speak to the heart, or the understanding?—and is every line in itself harmonious,—how little can it matter whether that line rhymes to its immediate predecessor, or to one farther removed, as in odes, or whether it is precisely of the same length with the verses that precede, or follow?

Fain would I have Sophia fix her taste on a more rational basis, by discarding a groundless aversion. It is not a singular one certainly, but it will be disgraceful to a mind of any expansion.

As to Mr ——, he is utterly incorrigible, and so decisive that, maugre all his wit, it transcends my patience to listen to him. He sets out well, with an enthusiastic veneration for Shakespeare and Milton. He thinks the best of Milton's sonnets equal to any thing he has written, and I am almost of his opinion; believes him, what he certainly was, the greatest poet the world has pro-

duced, Homer and Shakespeare only excepted. After them he admires Dryden, Gray, Addison, and Prior—does not admire Pope; utterly despises Mason; affects to think Mr Hayley a flimsy poet, and Dr Johnson a mere bombastic pedant, with moderate learning, and no genius; asserts that Miss Williams, and myself, write better both in verse and prose than any of the three. Now this makes me sick, and so angry, that his letters become a perpetual blister upon that love of literary, as well as moral justice, which is one of the best qualities about me.

And so you fancy you do not like Ossian. You, who are so alive to the sweet, the majestic, and the terrible graces in actual prospect, to be insensible when they are finely presented by the old Bard to your internal sight!!! Surely it is whimsical. The poetry of Ossian is not perhaps very valuable as a story; and though many of the speeches of the heroes have fine dramatic spirit, with true and exquisite touches of the pathetic, yet the dissimilarity of customs and manners, to those of our day; the chain of events, so broken by the perpetual episodes, prevent very awakened sympathy with the heroes and heroines. The scenic painting in Ossian's works gives them their high and exquisite value. They represent, in every variety possible, amidst an uncultivated, and naturally barren

country, its wild and solemn features. The mythology, if less various, and less interesting than the Pagan machinery of Homer, is much more grand, awful, and impressive.

I confess, however, that inevitable weariness attends a long perusal of Ossian. We should not attempt to read him regularly, but to contemplate him in detached passages. We should look attentively at his landscapes, but perhaps not consider them for a much longer time than we could, without weariness, gaze at a landscape of Claude's, or Salvator's. Could I persuade you thus to take up Ossian, at intervals, I am persuaded you would grow accustomed to his manner, and feel the truth of the poet Gray's assertion respecting these poems, that "imagination resided, in all her pomp, many centuries ago, upon the bleak and barren mountains of Scotland." Adieu!

LETTER LII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Dec. 29, 1786.

"I BLUSH, and hide my sword." You have disarmed me by the kindness of your letter, which I received yesterday. The love, respect, and veneration which I feel for my superiors in the science most dear to me; the gratitude which burns in my bosom for the delight their works have afforded me, and which will not admit my hearing, with unwounded ear, or without indignant justification, their just claims to admiration disputed; these, I know are amongst the best qualities of my heart; yet I begin to fear that this, I hope, generous zeal may have carried me, in my late letters to you, somewhat beyond the bounds of politeness.

Beneath your preceding reproofs for what I perceived you considered as arrogance, I could pout and be sullen; wrap myself up in conscious integrity of spirit, and say to myself, "He is a fine gentleman, and lives with senators, judges, and lords; he looks down upon contemporary genius in the poetic line, upon existing bards, and me,

their handmaid;—let him leave us our beads and our maple dish, with which he twits us; they will one day, perhaps, be more honourable to our memories than "stars and strings." We will remember how the genius of Collins was, while he lived, neglected and despised, till the poverty and disappointment, produced by that neglect and scorn, made a chaos of his brain, and an ice-stone of his heart. We will reflect that such contumely is no longer disgraceful to him, but shames the times in which it was inflicted; and thus the love of fame, that spur which raises the clear spirit, shall not be blunted by the fastidious disdain of any of our contemporaries. In the shelter of independence, we can smile at literary injustice, and commit our pretensions to posterity. If they are cogent they will prevail, and we shall be remembered when those who despise us shall be forgotten;—if they are not cogent, the dismission of them into the limbo of vanity will be nothing to us. Provided we have taken care of better things, we shall be spared the mortification of seeing them tossed about in that windy region, and finally sinking in its oblivious gulf."

Thus could I philosophize away all the mortification of your disdain—but against your kindness can find no shield.

I have lately been combating Sophia's poetical prejudices, as well as yours. It is these whimsical dislikes to immaterial circumstances which makes so many people of sense and feeling bad critics. Criticism must proceed upon a large scale, or her efforts will but deceive herself, and mislead others. She may, it is true, without losing dignity, *slightly* notice slight things, but the only requisites on which she should strongly insist are general consistence of metaphor, and happiness of allusion, appropriation as to character, vigour of idea, perspicuity of expression, accuracy and general grace of style, and picturesque power in the epithets. Where these are, how greatly is it below the dignity of her office to indulge unmeaning aversions to this or that order of verse; or, with yet more puerile petulance, to quarrel with words for their mere sound, and even to wage idle war with individual letters of the alphabet.

Above all, it is necessary, to form the useful and enlightening critic, that he should have none of those partialities which may lead him to admire in one writer what he dislikes in another. Justice does not allow us to go farther than, in consideration of ruder times, to pardon in an ancient what we might not be so ready to forgive in a modern;

we must not preclude to the moderns those daring graces which we admire in older writers, since beauty is confined to no form, no clime, no period.

You intreat me to relieve your solitude in Ormond Street. It must certainly be very profound!—Heavens! with the bar, the senate, the opera, the Siddons, the lords, and the ladies, how is it that you procure leisure for such copiousness of epistolary intercourse? I fancy, like poor Chatterton, that child of genius, you never sleep. I wish I could be superior to the necessity of such vulgar renovation!

LETTER LIII.

MISS WESTON.

Lichfield, Jan 15, 1787.

I AM sorry you find your marine shield so vulnerable, opposed to these wintry skies; but, as they have been uncommonly mild since you wrote to me, I trust, enabling you to use exercise, they prove salutary.

Yes, truly, it was a whimsical fatality that set me again to work in washing and mending the raiments of P.'s muse, by bringing the ardent and honest Dr Warner to Lichfield, with that same odd work, the Triumphs of Benevolence, in his hand;—the author unknown. Without discovering his name, he had left a channel of communication with the Doctor open, and had solicited from him and his literary friends, the correction of that rhapsody. Dr Warner, on fire in the Howard cause, was naturally partial to verses which celebrated the statue-design; yet he perceived how much they were deformed by the frequent mixture of bombast and vulgarism, by anticlimax and false metaphor. He solicited me to remove at least the most glaring of these stains. I made the attempt in his company, which I was too desirous to enjoy, to attend to the P—ean traces in that absurd composition. They could not have escaped a more sequestered examination.

Soon after Dr Warner left Lichfield, and before he knew the author of this work, I wrote to him that I suspected P. to be the writer—since, though it was in some places too good to be the work of his unassisted pen, yet that the absurdities were excessively of his species.

You will know how much I must have regretted the death of my excellent friend, Dr Knowles, whose soothing benevolence was salubrious to the spirits, as was his medical skill to the frame. His ever ingenious widow has answered my letter of condolence in an highly religious strain, and in that strong and beautiful language which, on all occasions, flows from her pen.

Lovely, sensible, and amiable Mrs Capper has followed her sweet sister, Mrs Wolferstan, to a premature grave. I have more depredations of which to inform you, committed by that pale and pitiless despot, on youthful happiness. Sunday three weeks, my father was prayed for in the Cathedral, and, as it was expressed, without hope of recovery. Mrs C. B. was at church, in the first year of her marriage, and apparently in the most florid health. The disagreeable prospect of losing, by his death, her pleasant habitation, must naturally rise before her mind, on this solemn commencement of its approach. Alas! she little thought that that day three weeks he would be recovered, and that a much narrower house would receive her insensate clay, then glowing in the strength of six-and-twenty years.

You have heard how violently her aunt and maternal friend, Mrs G., had opposed this marriage. There was little wonder that she, who

meant her niece to be the sole heiress of her very large fortune, should oppose the connexion, especially as, superadded to the inferiority of his fortune, the too vulnerable heart of Mr C. B. had been drawn into temporary alienation, from his engagement to Miss ———, by the power of beauty, to which that lady had no pretension.

They married in June last, and Mrs G. never saw her niece afterwards, speaking, both of her and her husband, with unabating and incessant asperity. But during Mrs B.'s illness, Mrs G. was agitated and miserable;—and, two days after the melancholy event, went, at four o'clock in the evening, to that house of death. She entered in violent agitation, and, doubtless, very real anguish. She wept over the corpse, loud and bitterly, repeatedly kissing the face, with passionate affection;—but, strange to tell, her indignation at the family remained unquenched by those agonized tears; and she refused, with scorn, the offered hand of old Mrs B. who had been a careful and tender nurse to her daughter-in-law, through the fatal illness.

Does not this visit remind you of Miss Howe's to Harlow Place?—the struggle of wild despondent tenderness for her lost friend, with disdain of the inhabitants; though Miss Howes's continued affection for Clarissa, was a contrast to

Mrs G.'s ungoverned resentment. So much the more bitter must have been the anguish of the latter, standing by the coffin, when, like Miss Howe, with wild impatience, she pushed aside the face-cloth.

Yesterday morning, Miss Nott came to desire I would pass that evening with her. At a quarter past six, the night being fair, star-light, and frosty, I set out to walk to my appointed visit. My way was by Mr C. B.'s house. I observed the chamber of the deceased, where both the shutters were open, to be extremely light, and the shadows of several people, walking about the room, were visible on the ceiling. As I stood contemplating the awful scene, I heard the knocking of hammers, that were sodering up the coffin. The lines from Shakespeare's description of the martial field, the night before the battle of Agincourt, rushed upon my recollection :

> ——————" While, from the tents,
> The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
> With busy hammers closing rivets up,
> Gave dreadful note of preparation."

The loud and dismal funeral-bell tolled this morning at break of dawn, and finished the mournful scene.

Adieu.

LETTER LIV.

MRS MOMPESSAN.

Lichfield, March 5, 1787.

PERFORMING my promise to you, I have attentively read over the first volume of Sully's Memoirs. Sometimes it interested me very much; but I waded through a great deal of it fatigued, and without interest. The little pleasure which reading history generally gives me; the slight and fading impression which its events are apt to leave upon my mind, probably results from my total want of taste for splendour, precedence, and power to influence the destiny of others. To me it seems a species of insanity, when a man, whom destiny has made a king, or a minister, sacrifices the lives of his fellow creatures, and produces all the numerous collateral miseries, parental, filial, paternal, and connubial, consequent upon every single deprivation; for what appears to me so little worth the hazard as an extension of empire, and the gewgaws of rank, even up to that troublesome bauble, the imperial sceptre. How much rather would I possess the inevitable future fame

of Hayley, of Cowper, and that of the philanthrophic hero, the illustrious Howard, than the military and regal reputation of your favourite Henry of France. Often, while reading history, do I exclaim, in the words of the philosophic poet,

> " Ah! what avails it me to trace the springs
> That move of empire the tremendous wheel!
> Ah! what to me are Statesmen, Courts, and Kings,
> Hands stain'd with blood, or arms begirt with steel!
> To those whom nature taught to think and feel,
> Heroes, alas! are things of small concern."

I admire the disinterested firmness of Sully's attachment to his intrepid Henry, and the inflexible honesty respecting pecuniary circumstances with which his ministry commences; but I want him to have felt and expressed more regret for the devastations and calamities consequent upon the struggles for the crown of France.

You remember the tower which was blown up at Dreux, by Sully's advice. I can scarce forgive the ruthless composure with which he describes himself as standing bye to wait the event; and with which he beholds it fall, dragging with it a multitude of men, women, and children, that were buried in the ruins. I know that these are the unavoidable evils of war, but do not take delight in their being circumstantially brought to my senses. I cannot *love* the heroes who cause

them, in despite of dear Toby Shandy's beautiful apology for the military profession, when he says, "It is one thing for a soldier to gather laurels, and another to scatter cypress." I expect to be more agreeably interested in the progress of this work, when Henry is settled on his throne. I hope he will then no longer think that to shed rivers of human blood will cover him with increasing glory; yet I, even I, almost catch his military enthusiasm, when, in an hazardous battle, he bids his armies fix their attention upon his plume of white feathers, and to follow where it leads, assuring them, that they will always see it in the road to honour and to victory.

Since I finished the last sentence, I am advanced half way in the second volume, and am more than ever dissatisfied with Monsieur le Roi. There is a continued ungrateful inattention to the interests of his faithful friend, and able minister, Sully, for which I hate him. As to his caresses, I think nothing of *them*, and wonder they could impose upon so wise a man, so often were they bestowed upon those whom Sully knew he despised. Witness, amongst many similar instances, the apparent affection with which he received the Duke de Main, embracing him, and holding his hand as they walked, with the insidious whisper of contempt for him, to Sully, over

his left shoulder, on the instant. It is only when he finds this great minister's abilities and integrity necessary to him, that he reluctantly calls him to the great offices of state. How basely slow do we find this thankless monarch to reward such a matchless series of faithful services! to admit this experienced friend and able statesman into the superintendence of the public finances!

Henry's long and tender attachment to Gabrielle is more to the credit of his heart than any thing I have hitherto seen recorded. From ambition or policy, all else seems derived which dazzles the reader.

But what is our astonishment to read, that one of the greatest monarchs in the world, for great, as a warrior and politician, we must allow him, seated on the throne of France, was often dirty and ragged, through absolute poverty, and had been more than once in want of a dinner. It lessens the ridiculousness of an old story of my mother's, about a bragging farmer of Rugely, returning from London, who pretended to have been introduced to Queen Caroline; and upon being asked how she was dressed, and what she said to him, replied that her majesty had on a dirty blue apron, but said she was mighty glad to see him; observing, that, if it had not been wash-

ing-week, she should have asked him to stay dinner; and added he was welcome to stay, even as it was, if he would take pot-luck; but that she had nothing for dinner but a leg of pork and pease-pudding.—Adieu!

LETTER LV.

Rev. Dr Warner.

Lichfield, March 7, 1786.

I entreat you will favour me with speedy tidings concerning Mr Hayley's present state of health. Your last letter has alarmed me on the subject. It is not a common degree of interest which I take in his welfare. Observing his constitution, I have always feared for his life.——

That you would be glad to learn that Mr Piozzi is constantly and tenderly grateful for the sacrifices his enchanting wife has made to him, at the instigation of the despotic little deity, I was perfectly conscious. Her fine talents, and the ungrateful abuse of Dr Johnson, upon this marriage, after the years she had devoted to render-

ing his life happy, ought, and will interest every benevolent heart in her destiny Such hearts will rejoice to see envy and malice disappointed by the devoted attachment of the highly obliged Piozzi, and by his acknowledged virtues.

I perfectly agree with you as to the genius and spirit of Cowper's beautiful poem, The Task; yet I somewhat wonder at the confidence with which it inspires you in the goodness of his heart. My doubts on that subject do not proceed alone from the severity of his satire, however ill I may think severity to human failings becomes a human creature. But if a benevolent man may be induced to wield, with harsh asperity, the satiric scourge, yet surely he will not suffer ungenerous sentiments to descend from his pen. But for the illiberal protest of this author against the generosity of encomium, against the gratitude of tributary praise, I should have read his poetry with pleasure unallayed, as I confess it was exquisite.

The Task certainly contains not only dazzling irradiations of fancy, but many noble sentiments. Alas! it is not always, that either one or the other afford indubitable proof of an author's virtue! The depraved and selfish often wear these splendid veils of light, when all is darkness at the centre.

There is a knot of ingenious and charming females at Ludlow, in Shropshire. My friend, Miss Weston, is its leading spirit. Do not chide me, that I ventured to send a few of your delightful letters for the amusement of this little society of intelligent friends. It has been a mental repast, for which they are infinitely grateful. The sister nymphs meditate a plan to draw you into their circle, if you should realize your idea of an expedition to the classic environs of Ludlow. It is a very formidable ambush, believe me. With plenteous resources of wit and imagination, Miss Weston's form is graceful, and her countenance interesting. Her friends are celebrated beauties, with minds much above the common female level. I see no chance of your escape, except from the number of the assailants, which, sluicing your admiration into different channels, may prevent its flowing in a resistless torrent over your heart.

It gratifies my literary ambition not slightly, that you liked me so much in my "doublet and hose," in the letters on Johnson's character, signed Benvolio. I was delighted by your recommending them to my attention, as able, eloquent, and convincing, without the least suspicion of the name or sex of their author. Nothing could be

more flattering than praise, so utterly exempted from the possibility of being meant as flattery.

LETTER LVI.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, March 20, 1787.

Respondent to your kind inquiries, I have the pleasure to tell you, that my dearest father, though weaker than ever in his limbs, and amidst the fast-fading powers of memory, has had no relapse since his dreadful epileptic seizures in December; while his affection for me seems to increase as the other energies of his mind subside. When I administer his food, his wine, and even his medicines, which indeed are few, cordial, and palatable, he looks at me with ineffable tenderness; and with an emphatic, though weak voice, "thank you, my dear child, my darling, my blessing;" and not seldom he calls me "the light of his eyes." The sensations of melting fondness which such expressions awaken in my bosom, are of unutterable pleasure. But, alas! soon or late, we generally pay an high price for whatever has been

cordial to our spirits, and sweet to our hearts. This augmented tenderness, from a parent always affectionate,—O! how will it embitter the parting hour, which I must consider as perpetually impending!

I have not heard from Mrs Mompessan since we parted. She does not love her pen, and she loves me well enough to evince, that frequent epistolary intercourse is not necessary to the duration, or even the warmth of friendship. Ever delightful is her society to me. Its interest increases as years roll on. Conversing together, we recal the past, and all that made it dear. My sister, crushed in the blossom of our youth, by the pale hand of death, again lives, and speaks and moves before us, in the soft light of her serene graces; my mother, in all the energies of her high and generous spirit; my beauteous Honora, as in the golden days of her prime, when her affections were warm, and artless as her bloom; her fancy gay as her smile, her understanding clear as her eyes. Yes, it *is thus* that our conversations lift the veils of time.

Very gratifying, dear Sophia, is the high value which you say that yourself and your intelligent friends set upon my letters. I cannot doubt your sincerity, else I should be inclined to exclaim,—"How is it that a train of reasoning can please,

since it does not convince?" Henceforth I shall be disposed to think all critical investigation useless, since a woman of your fine understanding can maintain her prejudices against a proposition so very self-evident, as that all which is worthy to please an enlightened mind, as truth of character; interest of situation; the force of imagery; the glow of description; the animation of apostrophe, and the pathos of complaint; may be almost equally well conveyed in one form of composition as in another. But if from the measure, its nature, and its arrangements, rather than from those essentials, results the material charm of the poetic science, then is that science but "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

I cannot resist making one more effort to convince you that you have placed your sensations to a wrong cause, and are unjust to yourself in avowing and persisting in a prejudice, which one quarter of an hour's reflection would enable you to eradicate.

You have often declared a particular fondness for Lord Lyttleton's lovely monody on the death of his wife;—yet it is a Pindaric Ode. Beattie's Minstrel also I know you love, which is also written in a species of the lyric measure. Tasting the beauty of those compositions, you prove that it is not the ode-measures which of *themselves*

displease your ear, or perplex your attention. If Gray's Ode to the Lyre, which, charming as those poems are, is poetically superior to them both, does not charm you, since all the three are equally odes, it must be that the objects of Gray's ode are presented to the imagination; those of Lyttleton to the heart; those of Beattie's to the understanding. This difference between them would have subsisted in the same degree if each had written their poem in Pope's general measure, the ten feet couplet, which is your favourite style. Those high and picturesque graces of the art, to which you are more insensible than I can account for, do, it is certain, generally wear the lyric dress. It is therefore the nature of the objects often presented in odes, not the style of composition, which fails to interest and please you. The odes of Horace in Latin, and the odes of Akenside in English, are taken in a much lower tone than those of the Grecian Pindar, and those of our native Gray—that is, their subjects are more familiar, and common-life. I should think they would please, and at length induce you to cry out with Juliet,

> "What's in a name?"—these, which are surely odes,
> To sense, and to affection, speak as plain
> As Pope's twin couplet."

Suffer me to make an experiment upon your supreme aversion, the measure of the legitimate sonnet. Most of the stanzas in your darling monody by Lyttleton, are capable of forming a distinct sonnet in the Miltonic numbers, and in the manner of Petrarch's, who wrote chiefly in that metre, though his fame as a poet has augmented through so many ages.

FIRST SONNET.

" At length have I escap'd each human eye,
Escap'd from every duty, every care,
That in my mournful thoughts might claim a share,
Importunate; arrest the bursting sigh,
Or force my tears their flowing stream to dry!
Screen'd by these cypress shades from every glare
Of evening lustres, that so vainly fair
Gild the green valley; let me now supply,
Beneath this lone retreat, which sorrow needs,
All that may give my burden'd heart relief,
And suffer it to pour its tide of grief;
Of grief, alas! that other grief exceeds
Far as love's tender throb, and vivid glow,
Transcend in joy's fine zest all other joys below."

SECOND SONNET.

" O! Shades of Hagley! where is now your boast?
Your bright inhabitant for ever flown;
Your once delighted master left alone,
And all the interest of your graces lost!
You she preferr'd to all that dazzles most,
In scenes where pleasure rears her gilded throne,
The eye of thoughtless beauty; charm'd to own
That your coy dells, and flowery vales engross'd
Her raptur'd choice; while every passion there
From the recesses of her spotless breast
She chas'd, save those the gentlest, and the best,
Devotion high, and admiration fair
Of God, and nature, with the soft desires
That wedded love augments, maternal love inspires."

THIRD SONNET.

" O'er the known vale I rove, with many a sigh,
To find the footsteps of my vanished bride,
Where oft we stray'd, 'mid evening's rosy pride,
In converse sweet, and with admiring eye
Beheld the summer sun go down the sky.
Nor in the wood, nor by the fountain's side,
Nor where its soft loquacious waters glide
Along the valley, can I now descry
One trace of Lucy;—yet, O! heavy hour!
All desolate of heart, I just discern,
Dim gleaming through you thick.t, the grey tower,
Silent and solemn, which protects her urn;
That pale memorial of those matchless charms,
That gave an heaven of love to these now widow'd arms."

I know not if this experiment will answer. I had not time to do it justice by polishing higher. It is an extempore experiment, and I grant that this measure, being of more difficult construction, is less calculated for an heart in the paroxysms of tender anguish, than the wilder Pindarics in which Lyttleton warbled. Tell me, however, with ingenuousness, if this alteration in the construction of the verse, has divested the ideas of their pathos. If you shall tell me that it has, I shall believe your prejudice against the *sonnet* at least unconquerable; and weary you no more with my labours for your poetical conversion.

You object to Ossian from its often appearing to you bombastic. That bombast may be often found in the Ossianic volumes is certain.—Macpherson doubtless extended the fragments he collected far beyond their original limits. I always conclude the bombast to be his own, the sublime to be Ossian.

You desire a specimen of the celebrated George Hardinge's style of letter-writing. I insert, for that purpose, the copy of a very short one, which I received from him lately. You will, I think, confess that it is at once singular and brilliant, and that his flattery is not common-place,—ecce!

"A charming letter from you, this instant received. Bless you for it. A letter once in two

months, then, is to be my utmost hope. Well I embrace your two months with their

"Sweet, reluctant, indolent delay."

No epithets in Milton, to be sure! Come, I must at last confess your contention in their favour triumphant, from the proofs you produce of their frequency on the pages of that verse demi-god. You write like an angel, and I would go to the end of the world for a lock of your hair; and so pray send me one at the two months' end—and let me carry off your picture by force from Romney.

"It's rather impudent, after all, that you should be so eloquent, so able, yet so feminine, so touching. It is not fair;—you ought to be an elephant, and you are a charming woman, dear to me as any one of your enchanting sex, though I never saw you but once; exactly an hundred and nine years ago. Farewel, Urganda!"

LETTER LVII.

Mrs Cotton.

Lichfield, March 23, 1787.

You misunderstood me if, in speaking of the refined, the learned and eloquent Mr ———'s union with a woman of such mere common-life talents, you thought I meant that happiness was confined to people of exalted intellect. So far from asserting that idea, I am inclined to believe those the happiest who mutually plod on in the narrow circle of every-day minds, and adopt prejudices for principles. No; I said, and I still think it ill for married happiness, where the abilities, acquirements, and pursuits are very unequal. Rochefoucault says, we cannot long love those by whom we are despised, or for whom we feel any degree of contempt. Something very like contempt must arise where the disparity is extreme, and the pursuits wholly dissimilar. My life has not been very short or by any means unobservant. Many miseries have I witnessed consequent upon intellectual inequality, where people have a great deal of time for companionable purposes. Where

they have not, it matters less. One happy couple only have I known, where there was the leisure without the powers for companionship. The late Mr and Mrs V. of this city. He was a man of wit and learning;—she the veriest intellectual blank imaginable;—but then Mr V. wished not so much to converse with people, as to be heard. He was not fastidious about the ability of his listeners. I have known him go on for hours, talking with infinite wit and humour, about himself, his connections, his wife's simplicity, and his childrens' good qualities—and this without seeming at all to want or expect respondent animadversion. Mrs V. was beautiful, good humoured, and silent. The last was an all-atoning merit, which does not often belong to so narrow a mind. The noise of the shallow stream is proverbial. This couple were happy;—but how rare is it that pretty idiots are quiet and silent! The new bride is not likely to be either.

I have this morning seen a very old acquaintance, unbeheld since my thirteenth year. I believe you know him: that shadow of a shade, Sir G. C. His figure is not an atom more formidable than in those my heedless and very youthful years, when, about seven years older than myself, the sight of him, and his tiny brother, dispersed my father's apprehensions about my accepting their

mother's invitation to pass a month with her at the old family seat at B——n;—apprehensions, which had arisen from her odd declaration, that she hoped her sons would be men of gallantry and intrigue. "Ah, ha!" said my father, seeing them alight with their mamma from the coach, "what have we here? these Coldbrands the giants! these same mighty men!—In the name of chastity let the girl go. If she can be in danger from such heroes, she must be infinitely too seducible to escape by any possible restraints parental prudence can impose." I, who had been educated in the strictest temperance of diet, and who had run about the fields in the bounding vigour of health, and with the gay hopes of dawning womanhood, was yet charmed with the novel ideas of B——n luxuries, and of bowling thither in a coach and four, with two out-riders. Deuce take my Eveish desire of rambling from my pleasant home, and healthy deprivations. Mrs C——n fed me up in that fatal month, like a porket, with chocolate, drank in bed at eight; a nap till ten; tea and hot-rolls at eleven; pease soup at one; a luxurious dinner at four; and an hot and splendid supper at midnight—the day-light intervals filled up with slow airings in the old coach, along the dusty roads, for it was in the heats of a blazing summer; and with lying on a couch, picking

honesty for madam's flower-pots, without any danger of molestation from her puny sons. I wanted to read to her: "No child, I detest reading."—I begged permission to walk about the gardens; no, that would spoil my complexion;—to pursue my needle-works in her presence; no, that was vulgar. You will imagine how soon I sickened of the joyless luxury, and unsocial grandeur, for they visited but little with the neighbouring families, who were too rational to please, or be pleased with the fine town-lady, who professed to think the months of country-residence worse than annihilation—Alas! my month of vegetation was pledged, and during its oppressive progress, the change of diet, and total want of exercise, gave my constitution its first propensity to plumpness, which, to my regret, no future temperance, or resumed activity, could subdue.—Till this luckless excursion I was light as a wood-nymph. The very many intervening years, and the change of effeminate youth into more decrepitude than usually appears in middle life, had not so obliterated the remembered traces of that pale and penknife face, that shadowy form, which "the blasts of January must blow through and through," but that I instantly knew Sir George C. If he is not more corporally consequential than he was at twenty, he is much more interesting. His man-

ners are those of fashionable life; his language fluent, and correct; and his even affectionate recognizance of our youthful acquaintance, slight as it had been, seemed to spring from a warmth of heart more valuable than exterior grace.

I remembered nothing of these agremens about the Master Marmoset of B——n. That long commerce with the world should give ease to the address, and readiness to the conversational powers, is nothing rare, but sensibility and cordial ingenuousness, are not presents that time generally makes: Yet I see no reason why it should not. Sickness, disappointment, the tombs of our friends rising around us!—all these things have a natural tendency to soften the heart, and to expand its affections. Why they so commonly produce a contrary effect surpasses my philosophy to trace.

As to Lady Fane, it seems strange that the close impure air of a vast city, reeking with noisome exhalations from the dead, the dying, and the diseased multitude, should be found more salutary to her constitution than the mountain winds, and breezes of the valley. One should suppose that the rudest breath of the hills would be less destructive, while the milder gales must surely bear more renovating power upon their wings, moist with the fresh dews of morning, and wafting the spring, the summer, and autumnal fragrance.

However, when we reflect upon the close sympathy between the body and mind, upon the tendency of corporal debility to deaden the taste for simple pleasures, and for the charms of Nature, we perceive the necessity of city resources, for that varied amusement, which is necessary to every degree of health.

"If Nature pleases not, we fly to Art."

For myself, I should be sorry to live in any place where the freshness, sweetness, and beauty of the vegetable world, might not daily meet my senses, and pour their soft balms over the pains of disappointment, and the griefs of deprivation. Nature, even in her wintry garb, delights me. You know my situation, though on the edge of a little city, is perfectly rural, unheard its din, and surrounded by fields and groves. While amongst them

"I find in winter many a scene to please;
The rude stone fence, with fragrant wall-flowers gay,
The sun at noon, seen thro' the leafless trees,
The clear calm ether at the close of day."

You have not, any more than myself, lost your taste for these pure delights of the eye and spirit. I regret that it has so seldom been allowed us to share them together.

LETTER LVIII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, March 25, 1787.

YOUR objection to the little discords which are, in some degree, inevitable to every language, and which, blending with the concords, rather increase than lessen the general harmony; your pettish quarrel with the letter *s*, which has very picturesque powers of sound; these, and other prejudices of the same sickly complexion, are unfortunate for your poetic pleasures, and render you, who are a man of genius and knowledge, a bad critic.

Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, &c.—even Pope, who is allowed to have carried the delicacy of harmonic refinement as far as it can safely go,—these poets have, in their best passages, a number of lines which contain similar discords to those with which you quarrel in this verse of Dryden's,

"Fed on the lawns, and in the forests rang'd."

It is agreed that the ne plus ultra of verbal melody, exists in the Eloisa to Abelard; yet, con-

taining lines like these, your coy ear will doubtless scarce endure it.

"What means this tumult in a vestal's veins?"

"No weeping orphan saw its father's stores."

"Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight."

"No silver saints by dying misers given."

And,

"If ever chance two wand'ring lovers brings."

Also, in Gray,

"And you that from the stately heights
Of Windsor's brow."

Your unclassical aversion to the letter s for the Latin has it abundantly as our own language, must, I conclude, deaden your ear to the music of this line of Gray,

"Fields, that cool Ilissus laves."

And to these lines of Milton,

"Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore."

And,

"On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks."

Also, to the celebrated couplet of Dryden's, when the lyre of Timotheus changes from rude and martial to delightful sounds.

> " Softly sweet in Lydian measures,
> Soon he sooth'd the soul to pleasures."

I know not lines in which the letter *s* is more liberally used, and they were chosen by Dryden to express the most agreeable sensations.

Those who desire to have a just perception of poetic excellence, must, with manly spirit, look for *general* harmony, superior to sickly niceties about verbal arrangement. They must have no squeamishness about the letter *s*, since no consonant has more power of painting to the ear—instance from the Penseroso of Milton, a wintry morning of Spring,

> " Usher'd with a shower still,
> When the gust has blown its fill."

In that first line it is the repetition of the letter *s*, which enables it so exactly to represent, by sound, a silent shower, as it descends. I am not afraid to assert, that there is a similar instance of sound echoing sense in my poem Louisa, thus

" And tossing the green sea-weed o'er and o'er,
Creeps the hush'd billow on the shelly shore."

When a calm sea advances on the sands, we always hear a sound spelt thus, ush—ush—ush.

Garrick, whose ear was indisputable, certainly, since he composed the Jubilee himself, and was to speak it, took care that it contained no verse whose dissonance must unavoidably grate the ear of people of taste—yet has it this line,

" 'Tis Shakespeare!—Shakespeare!—Shakespeare!"

Harsh as it is, I dont believe it was disgustingly so from his lip—and a poet is always to suppose his verses will be read well. No reader that knows not how to cover these little asperities, and melt them, by judicious intonation, into the general harmony, will ever give the power and proper effect to the most musical couplets. Every poetic writer will exclaim

" O save my lines from being read by those,
Whose rapid accent makes verse senseless prose!"

A good poet, committing himself to the skill of his reciter, will not scruple to use sounds in themselves unmusical, but in which more is gained on

the side of vigour and representation, than is lost on that of harmony.

I knew a gentleman who, God help him, could not endure the *hadst*, *didst*, and *shouldst*, inevitable upon the majestic plainness of addressing in the second person singular; and a duty indispensable to every poet who writes gravely. I asked my man of refinement if he chose the speech of Satan to Beelzebub should be smoothed into such civil, and courtly sounds, thus, "If you be he, but O! how fallen, how chang'd!" He replied—"Why, no, in the solemnity of that address I grant the *you* a worse evil than the harsh *st*, which it banishes." "Well Sir, let us see if you think such banishment an advantage in a passage which is not solemn; instead of

> ——————"Return fair Eve!
> Whom flyest thou?—him thou fly'st of him thou art;
> Part of my soul I seek thee."
>
> ——————"Return fair Eve,
> Whom fly you? him you fly, of him you are;
> Part of my soul I seek you."

But no—he was constrained to acknowledge that even there the change rendered the passage ludicrous. I then exhorted him, as I exhort you, to cease complaining of unavoidable circumstances in Nature, in science, and in art. Do not, be-

cause the elbow of a slender young woman is not a pretty thing, quarrel with a light and beautiful nymph, because she has elbows.

LETTER LIX.

MRS GELL.

Lichfield, —— 9, 1787.

AH, Madam, it is a too-confiding benevolence which induces you to suppose there must have been some good, even in such a being as that on whom Elizabeth's ill fate wasted her youth, her affections, and her virtues; something on which softened remembrance might dwell, as palliatives to the faults which ruined himself, and deprived him of the means to support his wife and children. But no! callousness and outrage, united with the vices of sottishness, unchastity, and extravagance, to rob the grave of its power, to screen from her recollection the miseries of their union. She wept, indeed, beneath the first intelligence of an event, startling, however inevitably welcome. She wept, from the consciousness of his being the father of her children but it would

be weakness in the extreme, if these are not the last tears she will ever shed for him.

I had, indeed, great pleasure in finding dear Mrs Port cheerfully alive to every agreeable impression, and disposed to throw all the lustre of partial regard over things which had, perhaps, essentially but little claim to the value which she appeared to set upon them. I do not, however, include in that number Mr Saville's obliging exertions to animate the evening we all passed together at Matlock, with the united charms of poetry and music. He alone, of all the warbling tribe, breathes at once, in his songs, the harmonic and the poetic spirit; and this, from powers which mere *musical* science, ability, and taste, however perfect in their kind, cannot give, without a combination of genius, sensibility, and knowledge, which are of higher extraction than that of the tinkling strings.

The rulers of our cathedral are a little be-demoned, or much be-deaned, which is nearly the same thing. They are demolishing our pretty choir at a vast expence, and to the long exclusion of the finest choir-service in the kingdom. They have shut her gates against her celebrated minstrels; turning them adrift to lose, or, at least, injure their voices by the rust of inaction. Yes, "they are pulling down the carved work with axes

and hammers." I question not Mr Wyatt's power of bestowing a great accession of future beauty; but he says it must be four years ere the alterations will be completed, and the service resumed. A four year's silence for "the pealing organ, and the full-voic'd choir!" Four years! Ah! how many of us, who delight in their power to lift the rising spirit in warmer devotion to its God; how many of us, before they are elapsed, may be slumbering in the impervious silence of the grave! Four years!—no inconsiderable portion of human existence! Alas! "a few lagging winters, and a few wanton springs, and the life of man is at an end." Of those which shall be allotted to my friends at Hopton, may neither disease abridge the number, nor affliction darken the course!

LETTER LX.

REV. WH. BAGSHOT STEVENS OF REPTON.

Lichfield, April 11, 1787.

YOUR Ode to Delius is beautifully rendered. O! the immeasurable difference between a poet's translation and that of those insipid versifiers, who

brew Horace in English, and make dead small-beer of him! Your Ode * is champagne from the

* *Ode to Delius, from Horace, Book II, Ode 5th, by the Rev. Mr Stevens.*

" Plung'd in the troubled tempest of distress,
Or borne on fortune's favouring billows high,
Weak fears, vain insolence, alike repress,
Remembering still my Delius thou must die:

" Die, whether grief distain each sadden'd hour,
Or pleasure bloom perpetual in the glade,
Where the stream glances by the festal bower,
And pines with poplars blend their grateful shade:

" O! hither haste, thy wines, thy perfumes bring,
And pluck thy roses ere their sweets decay,
Whilst fate and fortune, ever on the wing,
And youth's short lustre cheer thy passing day.

" Soon shall thy purchas'd pomp no more be thine,
Thy groves, thy fountains, and thy villas fair,
For thee no more thy hoarded treasures shine,
No more for thee, but for thy grasping heir.

" Wealth gilds the victim, but it cannot save;
The final power to one impartial doom,
Compels alike the monarch and the slave,
Ah! hope not pity from th' insatiate tomb!

" Fate ceaseless moves her universal urn,
Where human lots in mix'd confusion lie;
Each, soon or late, must issue in its turn,
And the sad prize of mortals is to die."

vines of Aonia. The first, second, third, and fifth stanzas charm me. The fourth is very well; but I think less beautifully rendered than the others. The last line of the concluding verse does not quite satisfy me. I feel a want of accuracy in it, but shall perhaps find difficulty in explaining the nature of my objection, viz.

"And the sad prize of mortals is to die."

Dying is an action, though generally an involuntary one. Is not a prize rather something that we obtain than that we do? To die is properly called the doom of mortality; but can it as properly be called a prize or gift which it receives? Death might indisputably so be termed; but dying, being an action, I think cannot. I translated this ode some time since. That * version of mine is from a prose translation, given me by my learned and ingenious friend Mr Dewes. It is more paraphrastic, and probably much more amenable to just criticism than yours, drawn from the pure well-head.

Let me exhort you not to suffer the stupid impertinence of our hireling critics to repress the exertions of your genius, assured, as I trust you

* It will be found in the author's Miscellany, with her other translations and paraphrases of Horace's Odes.—S.

feel, that, in whatever transiently eclipsing clouds dulness or envy may involve them, yet that fame shall one day consecrate to immortality the claims of the poet,

"If she be right invok'd in warbled song."

Adio!

LETTER LXI.

JOSEPH SYKES, ESQ.*

Lichfield, April 13, 1787.

RIGHT glad am I to perceive, in your last letter, the sprightly glow of your fancy; and for a reason more material than my own amusement, since well I know the son's danger incompatible with the father's vivacity. Silent as you are upon the subject, I see, in the gaiety of your style, Mr J. Sykes's recovery—yes, as in a mirror. On your own late indisposition, I will not condole with you. The recollection of past sufferings, merely bodily, and that have left behind them no vestige of pain or danger, give to re-

* Of Westella, near Hull.

turning health the zest of delight. The advancing year will, I trust, perfectly restore your strength, though spring is at present somewhat sullen, and comes on shivering, and with a tardy step; but I trust she will brighten on her progress, diffusing health and gladness from her wings, amidst the bowers of West Ella.

With all Mr ————'s genius, knowledge, and varied eloquence of intellect, I cannot persist in recommending it to my friends to put their sons under his tuition. Alas! he has not one ounce of ballast to those full sails of wit and ingenuity with which he steers amidst the dangerous shoals of life. His taste for expence has been, beyond all measure, inconsistent with the retired situation in which he fixed himself; with the narrowness of his certain income, and with his plan of pupilage. That taste involved him in perplexities, from which he will find it difficult to emerge. The consequences of this infatuation have unhinged his mind, and incapacitated him for the energetic and assiduous attention necessary in the education of youth, particularly at the period of life when he would receive pupils, during the ambiguous years of commencing manhood.

My father, then in the full vigour of his mind, warmly remonstrated with Mr ————, when first he took a house in Eyam for that purpose,

against the superfluous, nay, absurd elegance with which he was furnishing it;—white fringed beds for school-boys, azure stained papers, with gilt mouldings, and fine prints, framed and glazed, to be spattered over with the ink of their exercises, and broken by their robust plays! He talks much of having "built his nest in the rocks." He was certainly at liberty so to do, but not to hazard the contraction of debts he might never be able to pay, by lining with purple and fine linen, that eyrie for his eaglets.

Your friend's loss has been great indeed;—her brother, her beloved and constant companion, the soother of her widowed years! How are such ties entwined around the heart! When they break, our peace, our cheerfulness, burst like bubbles. Youth easily blows more of those soft, shining meteors. Hope supplies the materials, and decks their forms with a thousand gay and agreeable colours. But in declining life, she no longer presents them—at least for this world.

Alas, no! Time cannot make me cease to regret my changed, my lost Honora. Few days pass away, some portion of which is not tinged with sadness, from the consciousness of her extinction. From year to year, musing on her idea, I often seem inclined to reproach the scenes she loved so well for pouring forth their vernal and summer

graces lavishly, as when her dear eyes used to glisten with the effusions of sensibility as they gazed upon them. It is then that affection sighs amidst the smiles of vegetable beauty:

> "Since not for *her* the radiant morn returns,
> Since not for *her* the golden summer burns."

—On my life those people you mention have made a fine return to the kindness of you and yours. Reflection presents few things so painful to an elevated and feeling mind, as the frequency of human ingratitude, by which our confidence in society is unavoidably weakened. The instances you mention excite my indignation. Some years past they would have astonished me; but since my own experience can more than parallel them, wonder is changed into a regretful sigh. But never may the most repeated proofs of this dark depravity in the human heart, petrify ours with joyless selfishness, and listless unconcern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures!

Mr Saville thanks you for the Dandelion panacea. He will resort to it on the first returning symptom of the "yellow-tinging plague," as Dr Armstrong emphatically called that sick distemper the jaundice.

I am not surprised by what you tell me of Miss ——'s new attachment. Your pale and peevish

nymphs are always amorous. The snow about their hearts resembles that of our English mountains, rather than the snows of Taurus or Mount Jura. Sun-beams from a lover's eye, seldom play in vain upon the white bosom of a prude.
Adieu!

LETTER LXII.

MISS WESTON.

Lichfield, April 17, 1787.

You know Mr Saville to be a man of sense and a scholar, besides being completely master of his professional science. We have together, and more than once, read, with attention, the passage you quote from Mr Savary on the music of the Egyptians, and that of the ancient Greeks. Mr Saville affirms, that it is not only impossible to form any rational idea of this writer's meaning in those passages, but that he did not understand himself. It is certain that those languages, which are rendered harsh by being composed of a great number of consonants, are yet better adapted to musical expression than a dialect could be which

was wholly composed of vowels.—Mr Savary's idea of expressing our meaning by sounds formed of vowels chiefly, if not totally, is like that of the farmer, who, when he gave a dinner to the judge on circuit, with his council, insisted that they should eat plumb-cake to their roast-meat instead of bread.

Variety is the soul of pleasure in nature, and in all the arts. Prospects without hills; pictures without a due proportion of shadow; music without discords, and a language without consonants, must have inevitable monotony, and prove insupportably wearying to those who have been accustomed to the great effects produced by contrast in prospects, in pictures, in music, and in language.

That influence upon the passions, which history boasts of having been produced, in former ages, by the simple melodies of which only they were possessed, was naturally, I think, accounted for in one of my late letters to you. Familiarity with excellence has a prevailing tendency to chill and blunt the sensibility of its graces, and to render the judgment coy and fastidious. Upon two people, whose taste for music was by nature perhaps equally keen, if one of them has been in the constant custom of hearing the best music, and the other has had but seldom opportunity of listening even to the most moderate, probably the

simplest air, of perhaps but indifferent merit, would have more effect upon the passions of the novice, than the sublimest air of Pergolezzi's or Handel's, upon the feelings of him whose ear had been habituated to their admirable compositions.

Every adept in the science of music knows, that it is impossible for melody alone to have produced musical effects, that could, in excellence, bear any comparison with those which she has displayed since her association, in later ages, with the mightier powers of harmony.

The English language may have too many consonants; yet who, that listens to Milton's poetry, finely read, or to Johnson's best prose, or to Handel's oratorio airs, sung with expression, will pronounce it inharmonious?

In the amoroso style, we have beautiful music from Italy; more voluptuous certainly, but not more tender, more touching, more sweet, than the pathetic songs of Handel. That truth is now pretty universally felt and acknowledged; while none dispute the immense superiority of that great master in the more energetic harmonies. Thus is it proved, that our language, though less soft than the Italian, is yet sufficiently liquid for the most melting purposes of melody and harmony.

To descend from science and its professors, to individuals and their concerns. The world judges

of Mr ——'s affairs as it does of those of most other people, with very rash decision. So generous, so humane, so affectionate a friend, as Mr W—— has long proved himself towards Mr B., is not, I dare assure myself, transformed into the hard and merciless creditor. That business has been misrepresented to you, and is one amongst the daily instances which ought to warn us of the imprudence of lending money, in considerable sums, even to our dearest friends; since, if payment is ever required, it is almost sure to be considered as a cruel hardship; and, what is the strangest thing imaginable, by the public as well as by the individual, who has been, so much in vain, obliged. Mr W. was perfectly right in obtaining every possible security that might oblige his friend to live upon his income, increased to a clear 600l. per ann., by the possession of his new living, and this till he had paid, by instalments, his debt of two thousand pounds to Mr W., contracted full twenty years before; a debt, the payment of which that gentleman, in justice to his own increasing family, ought no longer to neglect. People in debt will not, if they have right principles, allow themselves more than a maintenance till they are free of all obligations. Wanting those self-impelling principles, it is the kindest thing their friends can do to oblige them to be just.

Addison lent Sir Richard Steele a few hundreds. Perceiving that he was blazing away in careless profusion, that led to ruin, he remonstrated upon the infatuation; and finding him incorrigible, and with a view to stop a career so dangerous, arrested Sir Richard. It answered the end. The startling prospect of a prison, for he was wholly unable to discharge the demand, awakened him from his dream of dissipation; and Addison withdrew his claim, upon his friend lessening the establishment of his household; and their amity, much to the honour of each, remained undissolved.

With all that absurd prejudice which frequently darkened the judgment of Dr Johnson, he violently condemns this action of Addison, in his life of that good man; an action which saved his friend from the ruin into which he was thoughtlessly plunging. That the undiscerning *many* should, at the time, condemn it as cruel, might have been expected:—from a philosopher and a moralist, we look for wiser decisions;—but Johnson always greedily caught at every circumstance which wore the least ambiguity of appearance, when he was displaying a *whig* character to the world, that he might turn to posterity the darkest side of the fact, and thus cast a shadow where he might more fairly have thrown an illumination.

As for the anecdote you sent me of Mr H——, I never had esteem enough for his heart to wonder that sudden prosperity should have produced its usual effect upon narrow minds, and rendered him insolent and overbearing; little appearance as his manners wore of those propensities in his years of at least comparative indigence. Those vices of the heart often lie torpid in the winter of adversity—

"It is the summer's day brings forth the adder."

Adieu!

LETTER LXIII.

Mr W. Newton, the Peak Minstrel.

Lichfield, May 10, 1787.

No, my friend, it is in vain to expect it—happiness is not of mortal growth. Every situation has its irksome circumstances; its griefs, its anxieties, and its regrets. I have mine—yet is my share of good much more ample than that of many who better merit the bounties of Heaven.

It gives me pleasure to hear you acknowledge, that the reflections I made in my last upon your destiny, its pains and its consolations, have softened the first, and added force to the latter. I rejoice that you succeed in the cotton business, to which your talents for inventive mechanism first introduced you. Heaven, who gave you ingenuity of so many species, will, I trust, prosper the industrious effort that virtue inspired, and that wisdom has directed. Successful labour braces the nerves, and is favourable to health and to cheerfulness, even more, perhaps, than Indepen dence herself, in whose train luxury, lassitude, and apathy, are too often found; and they canker all her roses.

Mr Cunningham's * sonnet, addressed to your-

* *Sonnet to Mr W. Newton, by the Rev. P. Cunningham.*

Of late, as Clio left the muses' grove,
To place on modest self-taught Edwin's brows
A pliant wreath of glossy laurel, wove
Where Agamippe's silver fountain flows.
A rival fair-one claim'd him as her own;
With figur'd ivory planes, that fill'd her hand,
And golden compasses, the muses' crown
She deck'd;—and thus she spoke, in accents bland:
" Let not the fairy muses' syren train
Tempt thee to slight my less engaging lore,

self, is not without beauty, though I have some objections to it besides its illegitimacy. The idea is good of the contention between the genius of mechanism and the muse:—but it is not in the nature of those passions from which contending ladies, however incorporeal their substance, ought not to be supposed exempt, that the former should deck the crown of her rival with the symbol of her own arts. Besides it paints ill; figured ivory planes and golden compasses upon a laurel wreath, form a strange contrast. *Fairy* is an ill-judged epithet for the muse, when her train are termed *syren*. It makes a jumble of mythological allusion astonishing in a learned and classical writer. The fourth line is one of mine, without any quotation-mark. He took it from an ode which he copied from my manuscript-book some years ago. The five last verses of this sonnet are beautiful.

You must get above idle scruples about shewing, or sending to your friends verses written in your own praise. The bard, like the warrior, is privileged to display the trophies he has won:

And swell the luckless, disregarded train,
Wreck'd on her flowery, but her faithless shore;
Be mine thy aims to prosper,—and to shine,
And Archimedes' fame, but not his fate, be thine!"

Caroline de Lichfield is the only new publication in which I have felt interested—a novel!—but exquisite in its kind, though the English translation equals not the original in French. It is, however, sufficiently enchanting from the pen of Holcroft.

You must not suppose that I make a practice of reading novels. I open none that have not been highly recommended to me by those whom I believe judges of fine writing. Caroline made my imagination, and my heart, its instant captives. Simplicity, wit, and pathos, and the most exalted generosity, are to be found in the characters, plan, conduct, and sentiments of this fascinating story.

Disavowing a propensity to read, and to love novels, yet have I always considered the Clarissa and Grandison of Richardson, as the highest efforts of genius in our language, next to Shakespeare's plays. I live in constant familiarity with their graces. Devoted to them in my earliest youth, they set my taste too high ever after to endure mediocrity in that line of writing.

Fielding's romances are also excellent, though I abjure the coarse unfeeling taste of those who prefer them to the glories of the Richardsonian pen.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of conversing with a valued friend, whose late dangerous illness forbade me to hope that we should ever more

converse together. When those we esteem have emerged from the valley and shadow of death, we meet them with redoubled satisfaction

"In the warm precincts of the cheerful day."

May you, dear Edwin, never find them wintered by the bleak gusts of disease or sorrow!

LETTER LXIV.

Miss Scott.

Lichfield, May 27, 1787

Mutually prevented from writing to each other often, I yet hope this inevitable seldomness of intercourse will not chill our friendship.

Mr Taylor's* visit gave me pleasure. He has read, and thought deeply. Few of our clergy prove such able champions for the great cause in which they are enlisted.

My poor father grows more infirm than ever; but his temper is become so tranquil, and satis-

* A dissenting minister to whom Miss Scott was engaged, and whom she afterwards married.—*S.*

fied with all we do for him; and his decay is so exempt from pain, that I feel an exquisite pleasure in administering to his comforts. You know, by experience, how sweet the filial affections find it,

"To rock the cradle of reposing age."

You request my opinion of Cowper. He appears to me at once a fascinating, and great poet; as a descriptive one hardly excelled. Novel and original, even in landscape-painting, whose stores the luxuriant and exquisite Thomson seemed to have exhausted; but true poetic genius, looking at the objects of nature with its own eyes, rather than through the medium of remembered description from the pen of others, will ever find her exhaustless.

There are passages in the Task to which I often recur, and always with unsated delight—viz. the address to Omai, wandering, after his return from England to Otaheite, on his native shores and hills:

——— "As duly, every morn,
He climbs, with anxious step, the mountain's brow
For sight of ship from England; every speck
Seen in the dim horizon, turns him pale
With conflict of contending hopes and fears."

But my heart renounces the ungenerous sarcasm on that voyage of humanity, with which this episode, of so much melancholy beauty, concludes.

The description of the peasant's hut on the mountain; of the garden; the green-house; the conservatory; the portraits of the foppish and of the good clergyman; the apostrophe to London; the winter's walk; and, above all most dear to me, a winter's evening in the country, and its social domestic pleasures.

But, in this very fine writer, most justly to be disliked is the uncharitable acrimony, and envious grudging of well-earned praise, which lour so dark, and so livid, through his poem. While its author looks on all human frailty with haughty scorn, and seems to hate his own species, he lavishes all his tenderness, all his kind fear of inflicting pain, upon brutes. I have not unfrequently observed this extreme affection for the lower orders of the animal world, accompanied by a cruel aptness to look on the dark side of human characters, and to aggravate folly into baseness, and frailty into vice. In *other* great men, we have seen pity for the miseries of cold and hunger exist, with a lamentable degree of spleen and envy rankling over every contemplation of the fortunate and the celebrated amongst mankind:—

Yet, even as men, Swift had his admirers—Cowper has his, and Johnson his idolaters. This is the summary of my ideas for all three:

> " I mourn their nature, but admire their art,
> Adore their head, while I abjure their heart."

You plead Cowper's constitutional melancholy in excuse for his misanthropy. That plea is often made for Johnson also; but if it is possible that melancholy can so narrow the mind, as to render a man of genius, like Mr Cowper, the avowed satirical foe of national gratitude, and of honour to the manes of such beings as Shakespeare and Handel, it then becomes a vice, against which every generous reader will bear the most renouncing testimony.

I have just sent a short Ode to Cadell for publication, on the speedily expected return of General Elliot from Gibraltar. His private virtues, the bravery of his defence of that garrison, which threw such lustre on the termination of a war, unjust, ill-managed, and every way inglorious, entitle him to far higher poetical distinctions, than it is in my power to confer. My literary friends here assure me, that this Ode is inferior to nothing of mine which preceded it. *That* is some recompense for the trouble, ever irksome to me,

of publication. It would be trebled, were it accompanied by a consciousness of poetic degeneracy. Be this little poem what it may, it is sure to receive the darts of malice from some one's pen, shot from behind the screen of anonymous publications.

Soon after our troops returned from Gibraltar, leaving their glorious General, intent upon the restoration of the ravaged fortifications, a military gentleman, of pleasing appearance, announced himself Lieutenant Seward, the son of a merchant at Southampton, to whom we knew ourselves related. He told us he had travelled from that place purposely to see me, whom he considered as the source of one the most important, as well as flattering circumstances of his life.

I was much surprised. He continued,—"I was at the siege of Gibraltar, adoring the virtues and the abilities of the Commander in Chief, without the most distant hope of obtaining the honour of his notice, much less of his friendship, to which high rank, or particular recommendation, were considered as the only channels, unless an officer could be fortunate enough to render very conspicuous service to the British cause.

"I received an invitation to dine with General Elliot, and was charmed and surprised at my good

fortune, without an idea to what circumstance I could possibly owe it.

"The General met me half-way on my entrance into his apartment, where he was surrounded by officers of distinction. His eyes shone with benevolent pleasure; and he held in his hand the Monody on Major André.

"Mr Seward," said he, "I am glad to see you. The instant I read this poem, it occurred to me, that I had seen the name of Seward on my list of the garrison's officers. I inquired your character. It was answerable to my wishes. Are you related to the author of the Monody on Major André?"

"I replied, that I had the honour of being very distantly related, but had not the happiness of her acquaintance." "It is sufficient, Mr Seward, that you bear her name, and a fair reputation, to entitle you to the notice of every soldier, who has it in his power to serve and oblige a military brother. You will always find a cover for you at my table, and a sincere welcome; and whenever it may be in my power to serve you essentially, I shall not want the inclination."

You will not wonder that this narration gave me unutterable pleasure, and that individual gratitude, uniting with patriot admiration, stimulated my muse to her best efforts. O! that she had

possessed the powers of Gray, or Mason, or Hayley, to have embalmed his laurels in the bright dews of immortal celebration!

Farewell!

LETTER LXV.

Miss Powys.

Lichfield, May 28, 1787.

I PURPOSE venturing to forsake my household-gods, dear friend, for a few weeks, and do not like to leave your letter, unanswered, in their protection. Miss Weston has been long desirous that I should visit her at Ludlow. From year to year I have designed it, but always thought my dear father's health too precarious for the experiment. Since he has passed the last six months without actual disease, and as Ludlow will next winter cease to be the home of my friend, who removes to town, I have resolved upon the journey.

Sophia is, like myself, an enthusiast in scenery; and she has set her heart upon shewing me the sublime and luxuriant beauty of that which sur-

rounds Ludlow. With all my passion for winding rivers, curtained rocks, devious valleys, and sheltering mountains, I am too indolent to search for them in distant parts of the kingdom, without the stimulus of friendship. Never did hart pant for the water-brooks more than I long for quiet exemption from intellectual as well as bodily exertions.

— — — — — —

I was much amused by your account of Miss ———, that being, whose brain seems, from your description, a whirlpool, the eddies of which have opposite currents, hurrying the ideas that enter it different ways; but whose virtues are as steady as her thoughts are confused and veering.

And so Mr ——— talks methodistically; but he was born to be what he has always been,

"Every thing by starts, and nothing long."

Jacob's description of Reuben may be applied to him,

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

How much the reverse of such a wandering fire is the light of her mind whom I have now the pleasure of addressing!

LETTER LXVI.

William Hayley, Esq.

Lichfield, July 15, 1787.

Thank you, my dear bard, for your letter, however short; and assure yourself, that I am highly obliged by your kind present of the admirable * little volume on Chesterfield and Johnson. A letter, lately received from Miss H. Williams, mentions it in the most glowing terms of approbation. This letter preceded the arrival of the work itself a few days. The grace, the spirit, the discriminating justice which breathe through its pages, more than fulfil her animated testimony.

Well does she observe, that it is impossible to mistake the author, though the work is nameless. You must learn to write below yourself, to veil those rays of imagination, wit, and knowledge,

* Entitled "Two Dialogues, containing a comparative view of the Lives, Characters, and Writings of Philip, the late Earl of Chesterfield, and Dr Samuel Johnson." Printed for Cadell in the Strand, 1787.—*S.*

which illuminate your writings, or it will always be in vain that you write anonymously.

The dialogue appears to me, in general, as just as it is eloquent. We find the author putting forth equally the full strength of argument in each disputant, alike when, in the character of the Arch-Deacon, he expresses the erroneous ideas of Johnson's nearly faultless merit as a moral and religious man; and when, in that of the Colonel, he combats and disarms the fallacy. The want of this fairness has generally disgusted me with dialogues, where one of the parties never say half that might be said in defence of their opinion, and only speak to be confuted.

The Arch-Deacon says, and finely says, every thing that can possibly be suggested to support the imaginary moral perfection of this great literary idol; yet, perhaps, not all that might be said for him as a poet. Since it is confessed that there is poetry, though not pathos in the Irene, surely no fair conclusion can be drawn from its failure on the stage against the poetic talents of its author. We must all feel, that without the aid of music, Sampson Agonistes would, in representation, have little effect on the passions of the audience; and if any judgment may be formed from translations, the celebrated trage-

dies of Sophocles and Euripides are cold as the Irene.

Entirely do I believe, that the pride of Johnson, wounded by the ill success of that work, was the reason why he did not often throw the splendours of his imagination into verse. Nor less is it probable, that this mortification whetted the fangs of his envy against the whole poetic race.

It is, with exact veracity, asserted by the Colonel, in this dialogue, that Johnson had no empire over the risible ideas, through the course of his compositions. That, in conversation, he was by no means deficient in that power, the colloquial records of that wonderful man bear ample testimony. But, totally forsaking his pen, from which also scarce any thing pathetic ever descended, he certainly could never have been esteemed a great dramatic writer, amongst a people accustomed to the wit, the humour, and spirit of Shakespeare, and to the impassioned tenderness of Otway. But then, it is only over the gay and the commiserating sensations of his readers that Johnson wanted empire. The assertion, therefore, appears to me too general, that he had no dominion over the passions; and that the simile of a king without subjects cannot strictly be applicable to him. That, as a poet, he is able to rouse and

fire, though not to exhilarate and melt the soul, his character of Charles the Twelfth of Sweden, in the Vanity of Human Wishes, bears resistless proof.

If want of the pathetic powers necessarily render a man a "miserable poet," I apprehend Juvenal, and even Pindar, resign their laurels, since scholars tell me there is not a gleam of pathos in all their writings.

Johnson's Satires prove that he had nervous and harmonious versification at command. The Colonel grants him a quick and vigorous imagination, elevated sentiments, striking imagery, and splendid language. Of the author who possessed those great essentials, it is surely not too much to say that he might, had he chosen it, have been perpetually a poet—a stern and gloomy one certainly; but yet a poet, a sublime poet, however the want of tender sensibilities might have closed all the pathetic avenues against his muse.

I think it possible to make fine poems of most of the Ramblers, were they put into equally good verse with Johnson's Vanity of Human Wishes; yet I know not if verse could improve them. You are conscious how warm an admirer I have ever been of his best style in prose; that, for abstract disquisition, I think it not only nervous,

but graceful and harmonious in the first degree; and that even the most beautiful poetry is not more gratifying to my ear than the rich and finely-rounded periods of Johnson's essays.

In these, your exquisite dialogues, the critical arms of the Goliath are most ably and justly turned upon himself. Every one of the Colonel's remarks on his criticisms are so convincing, that nothing less than the weakest and most superstitious idolatry can be insensible of their truth. Indeed, I have always despised the admirers of Johnson as an equitable critic, assured that they had not strength of understanding to think, or sensibility to feel for themselves; puppets to be danced upon the intellectual wires at the whistle of a great name, and by the hand of an envious sophist.

Considering this work as an whole, I am convinced it will be of inestimable value to poetic literature. It is the kind of composition for which my heart panted. Justice did very loudly demand that the bloody inquisitor himself should bleed.

And now let me thank you for the kind notice you have taken of my Ode on General Elliot's return from Gibraltar. The hackneyed nature of military victories; the unapproachable happiness with which you had pourtrayed the picturesque

feature of the Gibraltar defence; and, in short, self-distrust of all sorts, combated my gratitude to the truly great General for his kindness to my Relation on my account, and combated it so long as to leave me only a very few days for the composition of my poem. By the narrow straight, as to time, into which this struggle had driven me, I was deprived of the power to solicit your previous criticisms, or that of any other lettered correspondent. However, it has pleased the hero whom it celebrates; and it obtains your warm praise. Thus successful, I can never repent sending it forth to run the gauntlet of review and magazine criticism, or perhaps abuse, or to meet the frost of their faint commendations.

My kind friends, Mr and Mrs Whalley met me at Ludlow thus early, on their return from the Continent. Ludlow is the most beautiful town I ever beheld, in a country which unites the mountainous graces of the least barren part of the peak, with the rich cultivation of the midland counties. The pleasure of exploring its romantic and lovely scenery, was heightened by the consciousness of being on classic ground, beneath the ivy-mantled ruins of that castle, where the Masque of Comus had been written, and first performed; that we walked

"Amid the winding lanes, and alleys green,
Dingles, and bushy dells of that wild wood;
And scal'd with eager step the hilly crofts;
And stray'd o'er banks where fair Sabrina sits
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
The loose train of her amber-dropping hair
Twisting with braids of lillies."

Doubtless I have wearied you by the length of my epistle, though I sat down resolved to follow your laconic example; but, fascinated by the consciousness of addressing you, I knew not how or when to take my hand from the paper; yet you, amid the exhaustless riches of your imagination, plead poverty of subject. But be still, thou repining heart of mine; stifle thy selfish regrets; and, with a sincere benediction on thy favourite bard, that health, peace, and fame may long be his! arrest the pen thou art so prone to lead through thy mazes, governing it, as thou dost, with resistless despotism!

LETTER LXVII.

Mrs Stokes.

Lichfield, July 17, 1787.

I REGRET that we did not meet at Shenton on my return from Ludlow. Nothing should have prevented it on my part, if I had not so recently seen you at Shrewsbury, where my heart rejoiced in the happiness which it felt you possessed, and which left me nothing to desire for you but its permanence.

Sophia received me with hospitality warm as your own. When dear Mr and Mrs Whalley joined us, it seemed as if we were all actuated by one spirit. You will imagine our enthusiasm over a scene, with whose graces you are so well acquainted; yet Sophia tells me you have never been at Downton Castle. We passed an whole day in that charming seclusion. The scenery consists of a deep, winding, and narrow valley, which, in several places, for many hundred yards together, is wholly occupied by the bed of the most pellucid river I ever beheld. The rocks, rising to an immense height on either hand, are

curtained by soft and luxuriant foliage, whose latest fringe dips in the stream. We pass through this valley, over terraces cut in the rocks on each side, somewhat above the mid-way of their elevation on one shore, and near the top of them on the other. From these terraces we often descend where the valley widens into opening lawns, yet secluded, and lovely as those of Juan-Fernandez, which travellers so lavishly describe, or wander along green banks, where the scenery exactly resembles the celebrated walk at Ileham. Then passing over the river by rustic bridges, we scale the rocks to their very summit on the opposite shore, and see the wood opening its soft bosom to show the river gliding before us in a long straight line of light. In other points of view, the woods also divide to disclose distant vales of less coy grace, or the stern contrast of bare and bulging mountains.

In the highest elevation of the rocks, the master of this Eden has formed a rustic grotto and cold-bath, with very exquisite taste. We penetrate the recesses of these rocks, by a narrow winding passage, which conducts us into their centre, where they form a rotunda, filled with water, except a mossy bank about a yard wide, which encircles the bath. Its water is of the most perfect clearness, though of shadowy gloom; and

the scanty light, admitted from above, is yet sufficient to shew to advantage the moss, the shells, and fossils, which cover the sides, and the beautiful little marble Naiad, who lies reclined, and bending over the brink, with pendant tresses, and a pensive sweetness in her countenance, that well becomes the magic seclusion of that watery concave.

You who love to lay your head upon beds of ooze and crystal pillows—You who have so much imagination, how would you luxuriate in such a bath,

"When the fierce suns of summer noons invade?"

A young Scotch gentleman, of the name of Christie *, lately called upon me, introduced by a recommendatory letter from Mr Nichols, editor of the Gentleman's Magazine. This interesting young stranger is in very intimate correspondence with the celebrated Dr Beattie, from whom he shewed me a letter that breathed high esteem, and paternal affection. Mr Christie's sprightly wit, scientific acquirements, ingenious manners, and literary ardour, exceed any thing I have met of

* Afterwards the planner and editor of the Analytical Review. He died in London at an early age.

early excellence since I first knew Major André, in his eighteenth year, which I guess to be about the age of this literary wanderer. He was on his road into the Peak of Derbyshire, which he purposed to explore with philosophic examination. I tremble for his health, appearing, as he does, to have out-grown his strength; for he is very tall, and thin almost to transparency,

"While smooth as Hebe's his unrazor'd lip."

You have heard of the success of that worthless time-serving supple flatterer, Mr ——. These are the people who obtain patrons and preferment;

"And they take place when virtue's steely bones,
Look bleak in the cold wind."

LETTER LXVIII.

MISS WESTON.

Lichfield, July 19, 1787.

AFTER the delight of passing a month with you, dear Sophia, amid your classic and lovely

environs, you will be glad that I found my beloved, my aged nursling, as well as when we separated. I must ever feel a trembling gratitude to Heaven, that none of those dire attacks, to which his feeble frame has long been subject, assailed him when I was so distant. You saw how my anxiety to receive intelligence of his safety, from day to day, hurried my spirits, shook my nerves, and interrupted the dear satisfaction of finding myself in such society. Upon so long an absence I never more will venture till the hour of everlasting absence. For an existence so feeble and deprived, it is perhaps a weakness to dread that hour so very passionately; yet, O! we may have more friends than one, but we have *only* one father.

I have had a kind letter from our excellent Mr Whalley. It is dated Bewdley, and I think decrees the palm of victory to Sir Edward Winnington's scenes near that place, from my darling Downton. Were I to see them, they would not, I believe, obtain my suffrage for such a pre-eminence. The smiling, the varied, the grand arrangement of objects, may be found in almost every country which is in any degree mountainous, and where wealth has been lavished to procure picturesque disposition;—but the Juan-Fer-

nandez seclusion—the coy, yet luxuriant and romantic graces of nature; the total invisibility of art; these charms are perfect at Downton;—and, in comparison, magnificence, beauty, and even sublimity itself, are almost little in my estimation.

Often do I think of your lovely friend, Miss ——, and of those cruel anxieties which prey upon a mind so intelligent, affectionate, and gentle. Colonel Barry of Worcester is in Lichfield. He says few women have had more admirers—that she might have married extremely well more than once in the military line. What pity that she should have reserved her tenderness for a cold half-attached being, who so little feels its value. The once devoted assiduities by which it was won, were born of vanity, not passion, or they had not thus slackened in their course; at one time exerted, and at another withheld, as Richardson makes Belle Harlowe say of Lovelace, a mere ague-like lover. The sickly fever-fit returns only when alarmed pride fears that the just indignation its negligence has excited, may be chilled into indifference in that heart whose artless affection it will never ingenuously meet.

Mrs Todd is very good to remember me with such warm partiality. Her unaffected sensibilities and pleasing talents live in my remembrance.

Pray remind Mr Bains about inquiring the price of that picture* which hung in his drawing-room, and which he said was to be sold. If it should not be very high, I should like to become the purchaser, though, as a picture, I know it has glaring faults. The gay drapery is totally inconsistent with the story, and harmonizes ill with the character of the countenance—but the head is divine—the expression in all its lovely features exactly answers my idea of that ingenuous child of genius, of which the poet says,

"Deep thought oft seem'd to fix his youthful eye."

I long to possess this portrait; the sooner the better. The sight of it must be always connected with a train of agreeable ideas; for the imagination will instantly present, through a little glass-door, on the left,—

——"The soft umbrageous hill
That brows the bottom glade;"

And the grassy path-way that winds up its ascent; —and, dearer still, it will shew the friendly countenances of Mr and Mrs Bains, lighted upon with

* Beattie's Minstrel.

hospitable pleasure. Such is the power of ideal association.

Colonel Barry sends you his compliments, and talks with enthusiasm of your talents and graces.

LETTER LXIX.

William Hayley, Esq.

Lichfield, August 17, 1787.

Thank you, my dear bard, for your last letter. It has the kindness and the length of those former epistles, which were so much my pride and delight;—yet as I seem fated to tell you whatever arises in my mind, immediately resulting from what has fallen from your pen, I must observe, jocularly tho', that however gratified with the general kindness of your last, I am not flattered by your placing your friendship for me on a level with your esteem and respect for a certain august personage. Conscious that you see characters as they are, undazzled by rank, even by the highest rank, I am ready to exclaim, with Ophelia,—

"No more but so!"

I have certainly mentioned to you, that the rage of alteration had laid our ancient and beautiful cathedral in temporary ruins, and shut her gates against her minstrels at least during two, and perhaps several more, years. The celebrated Wyatt is here, planning changes, which do not appear necessary, and which will be dreadfully expensive. Whatever of splendour and of beauty the unquestionable taste of the architect may achieve, the idea of them nothing recompenses to the lovers of sacred music, the silencing, during a period of such melancholy duration,

" The pealing organ, and the full-voic'd choir."

Mr Wyatt's manners please me. I reminded him of the beautiful compliment which you have paid to his genius somewhere in your works. Assured that I could find the passage, I promised to look for it. It eludes my search. Pray inform me where it is; for he, to whom it was justly paid, has never seen that gratifying tribute to his genius and art.

I have been much gratified by the reports made to me, by Mr Erasmus Darwin, of the estimation in which Lord Harrowby and Dr Darwin hold my Ode on General Elliot's return from Gibral-

tar. The Doctor has always spoken to me of that nobleman, as a man of much poetic taste. Mr E. Darwin said, that, in a strict critical scrutiny of this little poem, they praised often and warmly, and made but one objection; and that only to a single word; at last, remitting the verbal sin to the restraints and necessities of rhyme, which often compel far better poets than myself to use an expression which, writing in prose, they would perhaps reject as not the best possible. The word alluded to is here in italics,—

> "The billows, closing o'er their trembling *frames*,
> Are purpled by the gore, illumined by the flames."

The last line, being a striking and appropriate picture of the peculiar feature of that naval victory, in which our ungenerous foes used red-hot balls, was worth retaining by a slight sacrifice in the preceding rhyme, of a word which might have expressed *bodies* better than the word *frames*, as *forms*, perhaps, or *limbs*. I considered the couplet before I sent the poem to press.

My poetic carpenter comes to see me soon. I had the pleasure of assisting to enable him to raise a sum sufficient to acquire his admission into partnership with an opulent cotton-spinner. He tells me he never made more than 50l. per

ann. by his former business, and that his profits of the share in the mill were last year 150l. This Being has great merit, in never having suffered the day-dreams of his imagination to lure him from the path of manual industry. Genius is to indigence a dangerous present. I shall rejoice his honest, modest heart, by shewing him the high praise with which your last letter honours that poem of his that I inclosed.

Dr Johnson's absurd assertion must have often occurred to you, amidst the beautiful compositions which uneducated Poverty has produced in this age, viz. the impossibility which he alleges of people in low life writing any thing worth attention. He observes, that "the mind can only acquire ingenious ideas in the mart of intelligent conversation." His observations on this subject close with one of those dazzling metaphoric decisions, in which verbal strength and point are so continually mistaken for truth in that author, by those who are either not capable, or will not take the trouble of thinking for themselves. "No man," says he, "can coin guineas but in proportion as he obtains gold." Newton, Yearsly, Burns, and, above all, the miraculous Chatterton, sufficiently refute the dogma. That its appearance in his writings was subsequent many years to the publi-

city of Chatterton, causes the reflecting mind to recoil astonished from its effrontery.

We have in this neighbourhood an extraordinary character, Mr Vernon, Lady Berwick's brother; whom, in early life, the form of an Adonis, an ardour for licentious pleasures, and for increasing the means of obtaining them, made a fine man about town, a knowing man on the turf, and a deep staker at White's, till he was about thirty. Then, turning suddenly from these soul-less pursuits, he threw his energies into far different channels, and roamed, in a ten year's tour, with enthusiastic curiosity, not only "the Celtic and Iberian fields," but almost every scene upon the globe which has been dignified by martial prowess, or has obtained poetic celebrity. He has seen, in tolerable preservation, a great part of the Temple of Ceres at Thebes; has stood upon Mount Calvary, Olympus, and the Aonian Hills; and has drank of the now nearly exhausted waters of the Simois and Scamander; has fought, since England sheathed the sword, the Indians for America, and the Turks for the Empress. He was some time at Gibraltar with General Elliot, and obtained the friendship of that illustrious Being. Mr Vernon, calling upon me lately, shewed me a passage in one of the General's letters, to the following purport:

"I am informed that Monsieur, (I have forgot the name) who fought so gallantly against me at Gibraltar, has been overlooked by his thankless nation; is out of health, and poor. Have the goodness to draw upon my banker at Paris for fifty guineas, and present them to him as from an unknown hand. I am not myself rich, as you know, or my donation had been less scanty."

What lustre does such a proof of generous goodness throw on the martial fame of this justly celebrated soldier!

My dearest father yet lives—and, I trust, not in any actual pain of body, or inquietude of spirits, since no symptoms appear of either; but the lights of reason, imagination, and memory, are extremely faded.

"Darkness gathers on the last of his days."

Farewell!

LETTER LXX.

Captain Seward.

Lichfield, Sept. 2, 1787.

Yes, my dear Sir, I have been honoured with a visit from your truly great General,

" With all his full-blown honours thick upon him."

The blended dignity, and kindness of his manners, perfectly answered the idea I had formed of the noble Elliot from your and Mr Vernon's description, super-added to that of public report.

You excited the flattering hope of his staying a few days with me. Could that have been fulfilled,—nay, had he passed only one night in Lichfield, the compliment of a general illumination through our little city had been paid. The words Elliot, Gibraltar, Victory, enwreathed with flowers, were to have shone in phosphorus upon the walls of our town-hall, and over the arms of the city. It was the contrivance of an ingenious young surgeon, of the name of Green, who prepared it when you taught me to expect one of the most flattering distinctions of my life; but arriving on

a Sunday morning, and departing in the afternoon, he frustrated the wish of our inhabitants to have welcomed, with public eclat, the restorer of the nation's glory.

Captain Gayleur and Mr Vernon accompanied his lordship. The former is a graceful young gentleman, strongly resembling the brave unfortunate André.

It gives me pleasure that my neighbour, Mr Vernon, stands so high in Lord Heathfield's esteem. He has considerable talents and exertion; and the warm, and entirely voluntary praise of so great and good a man, proves that they have been, at least of late years, directed to noble purposes.

Nor did Lord H. wait for my intended mention of you. We had not been ten minutes together before he entered upon a theme so agreeable, declaring his high opinion of your professional merit; of your domestic virtues; adding, "his wife will be a happy woman, and she deserves him."

My father had not sufficiently recovered from a recent epileptic fit for me to venture introducing him to my noble guest. Greatly was I disappointed that he could not have the happiness of paying his respects to one, whose name he al-

ways mentions with a tear glistening in his dear eyes.

I had presented all my publications to Lord Heathfield, elegantly bound. He would not suffer his aid-de-camp to carry the book to the inn, but held it in his own hand, as he walked through our streets. I know your friendship will take a lively interest in these little circumstances, which do me so much honour.

The public critics are so venal, or so partial; so perpetually suffer their publications to be the channel through which private malice may transmit its venom; so often render their venality notorious by extolling the most worthless compositions, that I feel it impossible to be flattered by their praise, should they extend it to my writings; which is very improbable, as I know I am not in their favour. Since, therefore, I could not be gratified by their applause, yet might be *hecticked* by their abuse, I never look into any review; and advise every author, who cannot stoop to bribe these gentry, to follow my example in that respect.

Thus shutting my ears to the critical owls, hooting in the darkness of anonymous spleen, I can say nothing to the stricture you allude to in the Monthly Review. I have just received an high,

and most ingenious compliment in verse, upon the ode to Elliot, which, by what you say, I conclude the Monthly Review abuses. It is from Mr Mundy of Marton, author of Needwood Forest, the best local poem in this language, and contains a sovereign balm for review abuse, if I permitted it to approach near enough to wound me.

I thank you for the tribute of love and esteem paid by Mr de Crosne to the virtues of your General. Crosne must be a good man. It is a degree of virtue next to that of doing great and glorious actions, to love those whose performance of them has been inimical to our interest, whether generally or individually. Farewell.

LETTER LXXI.

MR W. NEWTON, THE PEAK MINSTREL.

Lichfield, Sept. 26, 1787.

I AM very sorry for your declining health, and broken and perturbed rest. Perhaps your energies, the united force of your manual and mental industry bears too hard upon the vital springs.

Let me intreat you to acquire a taste for the sweets of tender indolence, when there are no indispensable demands upon your attention.

Have you seen the poems of the Scotch peasant Burns? They abound with the irregular fires of genius whenever they describe rural scenery, or the customs and characters of village-life. We find that he has looked at Nature, in her wild and rustic operations, with his own eyes, and he is particularly happy in his winter landscapes. But when he grows sentimental he has little that is new, and his plagiarisms are notorious. There is great originality in the allegoric ode which personifies a Caledonian muse; but he says there was about her

"A hair-brain'd sentimental trace."

The line is specked as a quotation. How a sentimental trace should be hair-brained, which means wild, giddy, unthinking, there can be no guess.

Mr Hayley thus replies to my inquiring after his opinion of Burns's compositions—"I admire the Scotch peasant, but do not think him superior to your poetical carpenter."

— — — — — —

From the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, a young

prodigy in science and literature, of the name of Christie, brightened with his society a sullen evening of this summer. Scotland produces more of these early enthusiasts in the arts and in knowledge than England, or than, perhaps, any other nation. High of spirit, patient of toil, and emulous of fame, they travel far and wide, and do their country honour in every part of the world, as soldiers, statesmen, legislators, historians, philosophers, and poets:

> "As from their own clear north, in radiant streams,
> Bright over Europe bursts the Boreal morn."

LETTER LXXII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 1, 1787.

I AM enchanted with your last letter of so much joyous wit;—circumstances so truly burlesque;—characters so singularly marked;—pathetic narration, with an awakening portion of horror in the conclusion; and, perhaps welcomer than all the

rest, the most agreeable and well-imagined flattery.

Since we have each so lately been at Ludlow, I wish we had met there. Chance must have brought about an interview between you and me in that town, but you might, at will, have done Sophia the honour of a visit. These past twelve years Ludlow has been her home. She quits it finally this month to keep her brother's house in the great Babylon. You could not suppose your name, or nature, as my friend and correspondent, unknown to her; and you must think me cold to the pleasure of imparting pleasure, if you do not believe my communications, from the treasures of your imagination, must have ensured your welcome. You were very absent not to recollect these things. Surely if you had, wandering through the streets of that town, you would have paused upon the threshold of your kindred spirit.

When I was at Ludlow in June last, a party of eight conducted me, one bright summer's day, into the recesses of Mr Knight's romantic, his, in my eyes, matchless valley.

We obtained permission to eat our cold meat, and drink our wine and water in the lower apartment of the mill-house, furnished in all rustic ele-

gance." The windows look immediately upon the river, that brawls along its craggy channel at the feet of those high and sylvan rocks, which, circling round the glen, and shutting out every other prospect, make the lovely solitude a very Juan-Fernandez. I should have liked to have met you in this secluded dell, and there introduced you to our party. Surely the years which have passed away since our only and transient personal interview, have not been so oblivious, but we should have known each other. Why do you think me cold to the idea of meeting you? You have no reason for such a suspicion, unless you put that odd construction upon my desire that you should bring your wife with you.'

A little more about this same party of ours to Downton. One of the nymphs that formed it, contributed, by an happy frolic, to make us fancy ourselves in one of the beautiful wilds of the southern latitudes.

She has immense animal spirits, and at times a great deal of genuine archness. Her sprightliness, and the command of her father's horses and servants, make her an inevitable ingredient in all the Ludlow parties of excursion. She is brunette, almost to swarthiness; and, though her features are not disagreeable, there are the thick lips, and

the large, dark, heavy eyes of the torrid zone. She had, that day, no powder in her sable locks, from which the heat, and riding on horseback, had taken every degree of curl.

In another seclusion, romantic as that of the mill, and more absolute, since it contained no trace of human habitation, or even footstep, the valley again widening into a circular glen, we sat down, beneath one of the surrounding rocks, to shelter ourselves from the noon-beams.

Whether the idea struck our little nymph of making the scene more perfectly Otaheitean I know not, but she ran to the river-brink, threw off her riding-hat, and, parting her long coarse black hair down the sides of her face, danced to her own purposely dissonant singing, in all sort of antic postures, and became the very figure we had seen represented in Cook's Voyages. We were all seized with the same idea, and exclaimed to each other "what a complete little savage—we are certainly in Otaheite."

I have procured the handsomest frame our neighbourhood produces for the* Armida-Imogen, as you oddly term your Lucy.

You were very good to the family you mention-

* Print of Mrs Hardinge, and her little nephew.

shivering on the Cambrian mountains. The barbarity they met from the fat Plurality of Windsor, amply entitled him to the lashes he received from your avenging wit.

I have been infinitely diverted with your image, presented to me walking solemnly up Brecon church, in your large flowing wig, while the requisite gravity of your judgeship's countenance was put to so severe a trial by the organ striking up, on your entrance, "God save great *George our King."—O! it was irresistible. Nor less ludicrous the choice of air selected by your preceding trumpeters, who played before you, "Youth's the season made for joy," as prelusive to the hanging sentences. These same trumpeters certainly understood the disposition of the judge, or else had received a private hint from you to make that odd experiment upon the risibility of your council.

It flatters me that my sonnet, which begins

> "Since dark December shrouds the transient day,
> And stormy winds are howling in their ire,
> Why com'st not thou?" &c.

Has, on the whole, pleased you so much—but I

* Mr Hardinge's name is George; he is one of the Welch Judges.

cannot adopt your dislike to the word *ire*, perpetually as it is used, by our best poets, as synonymous to anger; not only by the elder, but the modern poets. Pope's Homer says of Achilles,

> "Black choler fill'd his breast, that boil'd with *ire*."

And of another warrior,

> "So rag'd Tydides, boundless in his *ire*."

Milton also frequently uses that word in his blank verse, where its great convenience, as a rhyme, could be no temptation,

> "Thus, while he spoke, each passion dimm'd his face,
> Thrice chang'd to pale, *ire*, envy, and despair."

And Eve exclaims,

> "Me, me, only just object of his *ire*."
>
> *Paradise Lost.*

If, writing so well in rhyme, you were to write oftener in it, you would find the inconvenience of taking pet at words, and modes of expression in common use with our purest and finest writers. It would impede you more than you are aware of, in the ease, strength, and variety of your verses.

Dr Darwin is going to publish the second part of his brilliant poem, The Botanic Garden, from which I lately sent you extracts. Perhaps it may be too resplendent. Darwin polishes higher than even Pope, and is apt to fancy every thing prose which is not picture; forgetting that the sober parts of a composition, by contrasting the blazing ones, contribute to the general perfection of the work. He should reflect that admiration cannot exist long on the full stretch, but requires repose to recruit her strength and recover her elasticity; "that we gaze a while with delight on eminences glittering with the sun, but soon turn our dazzled eyes to verdure, and to flowers."

I am however surprised to find you cold to Darwin's poetic powers; to see you terming him too much of an epithet-monger to be a fine poet in your estimation. Surely his genius is strong, glowing, and original; his numbers grand, rich, and harmonious, though perhaps not sufficiently easy and various.

The feeble make-weight epithet I dislike, as much as you can do—but the plenteous use of judicious picturesque epithets is vital to poetry. Milton, who imitates Homer closely, has, like his model, more epithets than any of our bards; since, besides the frequent compound epithet, he often gives four or five to a single substantive.

I have lately been reading Professor Spence's criticisms on Pope's Odyssey. His opinions do not always strike me as just, indeed much the reverse; but I entirely subscribe to the truth of what he says about epithets, thus—"The chief method of enlivening the poetic style is, the free and various use of epithets. This occasions that large and unrestrained use of them in poetry, so much beyond what we find in oratory. Homer is, above all other bards, lavish in the use of them; yet not one of the ancient critics censures him on that account. Epithets, like pictures in miniature, are often entire descriptions in one word. This may be either from their own significance, or by some immediate connection with some known object. We see the very object by the force of the epithet, when Homer says, 'the nodding crest.' We often see the whole person in an epithet, from our being acquainted with some statue or picture to which it refers. Thus, when, Apollo is called the archer-god, it recalls to our memory the representation the painters have given us of that deity. The complete figure is brought to our eyes by touching on that single circumstance."

So much for criticism.—This is a long letter. —Adieu! for it is more than time.

LETTER LXXIII.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, Oct. 6, 1787.

Mrs Piozzi completely answers your description;—her conversation is that bright wine of the intellects which has no lees.

Your letter, that was to have introduced us to each other, did not reach me till three days after she and Mr Piozzi had left Lichfield. Dr Falconer obligingly called to tell me that she was in our city. I had my doubts whether an unintroduced visit might not be thought a liberty. While I was balancing the idea, Mr Parker came in and laught me out of the scruple.

I shall always feel indebted to him for eight or nine radiant hours of Mr and Mrs Piozzi's society. They passed one evening here, and I the next with them at their inn.

My cousin, Mr H. White, whom Dr Johnson once called "the rising strength of Lichfield," and who, when perfectly awake from an intellectual torpor, which is apt to overcloud him, is very ingenious; and when he rubs his eyes, and

looks, has very distinct perceptions of genius in others;—our nabob of lively records, and his relation, Colonel Barry of Worcester, whose military exertions have had eclat; who, in early youth, succeeded the unfortune André in an admiring passion for Honora Sneyd; and, after his sad fate, succeeded that gallant officer in his appointments in America; who has studied politeness from Chesterfield, poetry after our best critics, and moral philosophy and style after Johnson;—these personages met your friends at my little supper. The evening was Attic.

Mr Saville being last week at Birmingham oratorios, I could not have the pleasure of introducing him to Mr and Mrs Piozzi; but, as they desired me to bring any of my friends in the afternoon, I took his timid Philomela in my hand. Never had Mr Piozzi two beings of his audience who were more charmed with his perfect expression on his instrument, and with the touching and ever-varying grace with which he sings. Surely the finest sensibilities must vibrate through his frame, since they breathe so sweetly through his song, though his imperfect knowledge of our language prevents their appearing in conversation. I am sure he values, as he ought, the honour and happiness he has obtained, of which the elegances of wealth, and the blessings of independence,

form the smallest part. He seemed much pleased with Mrs Smith's voice, and the melting sweetness of her manner, in singing, amidst all the disadvantages of her timidity.

Your letter has this moment reached me. I am concerned for your late illness, and fear that your life is less tranquil, and your sympathy more keen than suits the delicacy of your constitution. Mrs Siddons' and Mrs Jackson's unhappiness have grieved you. That of the former I hope is past. May the life, above all others, precious to Mrs Jackson, and which, when you wrote, hung in fearful balance, have, ere this time, preponderated on the vital side!—that it may not be her fate, " like the weak and widowed vine,

" To wind her blasted tendrils o'er the plain!"

I cannot help being glad that Sophia's London scheme is, at last, realized, whatever clouds and shadows rest upon it. Time, I hope, will disperse them, and cheerfulness, that sun of the mind, gild the long wish of her heart, metropolitan society. She is certainly more formed for that than to muse in silent glades, and court the sylvan pleasures—she will not say, apostrophising *them*,

" O! take me to your haunts again,
The rocky spring, the greenwood's shade!"

Autumn is now gilding them with her last smiles.
Adieu!

LETTER LXXIV.

Wm. Hayley, Esq.

Lichfield, Oct. 6, 1787.

The teasing demon of *petit* ill-luck, which so frequently presides over my speeches, has, it seems, raised a mist over your recollection also; so that you cannot direct my search where to find, amid the bright mazes of your compositions, that beautiful compliment you certainly have somewhere paid to our great architect. Thus am I doomed to the vexation of having excited the most flattering of all ideas in the breast of an amiable man, without the possibility of gratifying it.

A friend in Shropshire has lately shewn me the wonders of Colebrooke Dale. We passed a fine autumnal day in exploring the features of that scene, where we find, in such uncommon union,

the dusky, noisy, assiduous, and indeed stupendous efforts of art, with romantic nature;—where the Cyclops usurp the dwellings of the Naiads and Dryads, and drown, with their dissonance, the woodland song; light their blazing fires on each of the many hills, and, with their thick black smoke, shroud, as with a sable crape, the lavish woods and fantastic rocks; sully the pure waters of the Severn, and dim the splendour of the summer's sun; while the shouts of their crouding barges, and the clang of their numerous engines, din through every winding of the valley. In short, we there saw a town, noisy and smouldering, and almost as populous as Birmingham, amidst sylvan hills, lofty rocks, and meandering waters. You have heard of the lately-discovered bituminous fluid, distilling through the subterraneous cliffs. We found the iron bridge very stupendous in the art of its construction, and very beautiful in the grace and lightness of its appearance—but it is represented so exactly in the prints, as to leave the eye little to acquire by actual contemplation.

I am become acquainted with Mr and Mrs Piozzi. Dr Johnson told me truth when he said she had more colloquial wit than most of our literary women. It is indeed a fountain of perpetual flow;—but he did not tell me truth when he asserted that Piozzi was an ugly dog, without

particular skill in his profession. Mr Piozzi is an handsome man, in middle life, with gentle, pleasing, and unaffected manners, and with very eminent skill in his profession. Though he has not a powerful or fine toned voice, he sings with transcending grace and expression.

Dr Darwin's Botanic Garden is contracted for with the booksellers, and we may expect its appearance next spring. Splendid and charming as is this poem, yet, written upon the, I think, mistaken system, that nothing which is not imagery should find a place in poetry, the incessant profusion of ornament will perhaps be a disadvantage to the work in general, as to the pleasure and attention it has, from the genius of its author, so just a right to expect every reader will feel and express. The Botanic Garden is a string of poetic brilliants, and they are of the first water; but the eye will be apt to want the intersticial black velvet to give effect to their lustre.

Ah! my dear bard, I would to Friendship, that I might find your letters less the reverse in their infrequency to the pictures of the Botanic Garden, kindred as they are to them in the brightest tints of imagination.

LETTER LXXV.

F. N. C. Mundy, Esq*.

Lichfield, Oct. 10, 1787.

I cannot help once more intruding on your attention, with my thanks that you have granted a request which I had set my heart on obtaining. My gratitude will not brook delay, even though my heart yet trembles from yesterday's storm; another dangerous attack on the life of my dear aged father; but danger, for the present, is once again passed away.

A perusal of the posthumous works of that sweet suffering saint, Miss Bowdler, has pleased me much. If they contain no great resplendence of genius, nor curious novelty of ideas, we yet feel our hearts and our understandings serenely warmed and gratified by the effusions of a pure, a gentle, a cultivated mind, which throws a soft, agreeable, and useful light over every subject on which it descants.

* This Gentleman, author of the Poem on Needwood Forest, is still alive, and resides at Mark-eaton, near Derby.—1810.

So your learned pedant asserted, that nothing could be more absurd than the idea, in Gray's Welch Bard, that the victorious army of Edward were alarmed, and that one of its chiefs stood entranced, at the voice of an old man from a rock. He who could talk thus of Gray's Old Man, must have an imagination dull as that of an old woman, whose youth had been occupied in making pies and puddings, and nursing rickety children. He an admirer of Shakespeare! Whip me such critics, and such admirers, round Parnassus, O ye muses!

Your other dogmatist, who declared that nothing was so easy as to write well in rhyme, like the fox contemplating the high-hung grapes, speaks lightly, but not sincerely, of a treasure which he finds himself unable to obtain. The use of rhymes must necessarily increase the difficulty of writing in measure; and when it is remembered that the great critic, Cicero, tried, in vain, to write good poetry, we find the asserted ease of the art presumptuous and ridiculous, because evidently false. Merely to jingle common-place ideas in rhyme, may be easy enough; but to make fine sense, animated and appropriate description, and beautiful imagery, recline gracefully on that Procrustean bed, is about as easy as to compose music like Handel or Hedyen, and to paint like Reynolds, Romney, and Fuzeli.

When Mrs Knowles, who knows the difficulties and the merits of the pencil, saw Romney's Circe, she exclaimed, "What a number of bad, indifferent, moderate, good, and very good pictures must the hand paint ere it attains the sublimity of that figure!"

So may it be said of Allegro Penseroso, the Triumphs of Temper, and the Needwood Forest. If I am any judge of poetry, the last-named work is, as a descriptive poem, little inferior to the two first. Publish it at large, I adjure you, yet again; and reflect upon this truth for your comfort, respecting the publication of your juvenile compositions,—that they have not, by many degrees, the inferiority to your Needwood, that the poems in the 2d volume of Milton, which were written between his eighteenth and twenty-third years, have to his Allegro and Il Penseroso. Poems that are pretty, though not perhaps first-rate, move, in the eyes of posterity, like satellites round the orb of a great work, and adorn its appearance, though they may not increase its lustre. Remember!—and do not continue to wrap your talents in a napkin, unfolding them only to individual inspection.

LETTER LXXVI.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Oct. 25, 1787.

As to your verbal aversions, friend of mine, and witty son of Themis, nothing in nature, science, or fashion itself, was ever so unaccountable. Your protest against the words mossy, breezy, turfy, steepy, windy, &c. must, in common justice, extend to all their brethren of the *y* termination—to gloomy, glassy, airy, flowery, wintry, angry, &c.

> "No more the grotts shall I behold you climb,
> Or *steepy* hills, to crop the *flowery* thyme."—*Dryden.*

Whence can the dislike spring? Have we too many vowels in our language, that you seek to render it harsher, by depriving us of a privilege by which we are at once enabled to condense our sense, to give picture with fewer strokes of the pen, and to soften our terminations?

It was necessary to the appropriation of Mr Mundy's description, that he should shew the

turfiness of the forest-glades, since glades are not all turfy; and why should he circumambulate the vocabulary for another couplet, to talk in harsher diction about glades of turf, lest there should be a mortal, whose ear was so whimsically constructed, that it could not endure the epithet *turfy*? How was he to divine a possibility so improbable? You are, in truth, a very presbyterian as to language, "blaspheming custard and plumb-porridge."

Alterations in pretty verses, made in the paroxysms of the toothach, were not likely to be worth much, and you are welcome to shoot them out of existence with the arrows of your wit. I always considered *yearning* as a stronger expression, but synonymous to *longing*. I know it is a scriptural phrase; but I did not know, till you informed me, that it had an inseparable connection with the abdominal fiddle-strings.

Spence's rules for the fabrication of poetry are good; but when he applies them to criticising particular passages, he blunders horribly. Some two months since, Sir James Lake recommended to my attention Spence's Dissertation on the Odyssey. Till then, I knew not of its existence. This request has led me into the composition of a critical tract, which covers seventeen sheets of

paper, and enters the lists against more than one Zoilus.

Adio!

LETTER LXXVII.

Mrs Knowles.

Lichfield, Oct. 29, 1787.

The intelligencer of former times, Captain Wolesley, has been here, after having, during very many years, ceased to exhibit himself in this place, with his meaning smile, and nod of confirmation, which gives rumour so much the air of truth. He told me of marriage-vestments preparing for you; announced Bath the scene where the warp and woof of your bridal-sheets were casting; that a man of large fortune had set the Lady Destinies at work, who was *en train* to renounce the great * Diana of Ephesus for the Mary of the Meeting-House.

* Mrs Knowles, who is a Quaker, used to give that term to our Established Church.—*S.*

The moment she heard of your widowhood, shrewd Mrs Cobb pronounced you a bank-bill, whom any man would accept at sight. Ah me! my heart smites me that I should write thus sportively of a situation, in which you are placed by an event which has cost me many sighs, and which I shall always regret.

Your letter from Buxton, so all yourself in wit and spirit, made me hope and look from day to day, to see you here in your road to town. Its pictures of Buxton have science in them to delight a philosophic amateur, and grotesque original humour to divert the merest John Bull, if there should be an atom of risibility in his composition.

I told you of the groundless idea taken up in this place about your being left in narrow circumstances, solely to obtain your own authority for contradicting it, and without a shadow of apprehension that it had any basis. I, who had been a witness, during some weeks, at different times, to Dr Knowles's immense practice; who also knew that nothing resembling luxury or unnecessary expence prevailed in your family; I, to whom he had mentioned having realised ten thousand pounds in the year 1783, could not but be assured, you had a much larger income left you than you ever would expend.

Mr Sneyd said a great deal to me of magnetism, but treated it as an artful imposition, marvelling much how it could obtain a moment's credit with you; yet he expressed a wish that I should obtain from yourself the grounds of your belief. To make me hold my opinions in suspense upon the experiments, it was sufficient that they had the sanction of your trust and confidence, whatever air of wild improbability they wore.

I always considered General Elliot's defence of Gibraltar as a truly great, patriotic, and heroic action; that it restored a large portion of our credit in the eyes of Europe, sullied, and indeed almost annihilated by the deep disgrace of an unjust, a foolish, direfully expensive, long, and disastrous war; that, by this action alone, we were enabled to make a creditable peace, and, in some degree, regain our prosperity as a nation. Military victories, in general, are by no means the darling themes of my muse; but, with these ideas, it was impossible I could think that of the Gibraltar defence any way inimical to morality.

Adieu!

LETTER LXXVIII.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Nov. 11, 1787.

SEDUCER!—thou hast made me what I thought to have left the world without having ever been—in love with a Lord. His last letter, which you inclosed, concerning his opinion on capital punishments, has fairly done the business; and I had rather be honoured with Lord Camelford's amity, than with the marked attention and avowed esteem of most other of the titled sons of our land.

Lord C.'s wit, his ease, and those descriptive powers, which bring scenery to the eye with the precision of the pencil, had previously delighted me; but with the *heart*, sweetly shining out in his last epistle, I am so intemperately charmed, that his idea often fills my eyes with those delicious tears, which, beneath the contemplation of virtues, that emulate what we conceive of Deity, instantaneous spring to the lids, without falling from them; tears, which are at once prompted,

and exhaled by pleasurable sensations. Suffer me to detain, yet a little longer, these scriptures of genius and of mercy.

And now for a little picking at our everlasting bone of contention. Hopless love is apt to make folk cross; so you must expect me to snarl a little.

I am not to learn that there is a large mass of bad writing in Shakespeare; of stiff, odd, affected phrases, and words, which somewhat disgrace him, and would ten times more disgrace a modern writer, who has not his excuses to plead. All I contend for, and it is a point on which I have the suffrage of most ingenious men, that his best language, being more copious, easy, glowing, bold, and nervous, than that of perhaps any other writer, is the best model of poetic language to this hour, and will remain so "to the last syllable of recorded time;" that his bold licences, when we feel that they are happy, ought to be adopted by other writers, and thus become established privileges; and that present and future English poets, if they know their own interest, will, by using his phraseology, prevent its ever becoming obselete.

Amid the hurry in which I wrote last, my thankless pen made no comment upon the wel-

come information you had given, that Mr Wyatt liked me a little. Assure yourself I like him a great deal more than a little. There's fine style for you! Next to benevolent Virtue, thou Genius, art my earthly divinity. To thy votaries, in every line, I look up with an awe-mixed pleasure which it is delicious to feel.

When he was first introduced to me, the glories of our Pantheon rushing on my recollection, my heart beat like a love-sick girl's, on the sight of her inamorato;

> "A different cause, says Parson Sly,
> The same effect may give."

I am glad you like Hayley's countenance. How have I seen those fine eyes of his sparkle, and melt, and glow, as wit, compassion, or imagination had the ascendance in his mind!

Mrs Hardinge seems to have as much wit as yourself; the conversational ball must be admirably kept up between you. One of your characteristic expressions about her is as complete a panegyric as ever man made upon woman. "She is of all hours." If it is not in Shakespeare, and I do not recollect it there, it is like, it is worthy of his pen.

About the Herva of my friend Mathias, we

are for once in unison; but you are not half so candid as I am. Ever have you found me ready to acknowledge the prosaism of many lines which you have pointed out in my most favourite poets. I sent you some of my late friend's, and your idol, Davies, which you could not but feel were unclassical, and inelegant in the extreme; yet no such concession have you made to those instances.

I have frequently mentioned Cowper's Task to you; but you are invincibly silent upon that subject. Have I not reason to reproach? How should an enthusiast in the art she loves bear to see her friend thus coldly regardless of such a poet as Cowper, while he exalts Davies above a Beattie, an Hayley; above the author of Elfrida and Caractacus!—for said not that friend, that no modern poet was so truly a poet as Davies?

He who can think so, would, I do believe, peruse, with delectable stoicism, a bard who should now rise up with all the poetic glories that lived on the lyres of Shakespeare and Milton. "If ye believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither shall ye be persuaded by me, though one arose from the dead;"—and so much at present for prejudice and criticism.

As for the last sentence in your letter, my friend, I meddle not with politics;—yet confess myself delighted with our juvenile minister, of whom, I trust, we may say of his political, as well as natural life, for many years to come,

"Our young Marcellus was not born to die."

Adieu!

LETTER LXXIX.

REV. Dr GREGORY *, on his Translation of BISHOP LOWTH's Lectures on Hebraic Poetry.

Lichfield, Nov. 13, 1787.

ENTERTAINED, instructed, and delighted as I have been by your valuable work, I cannot resist the desire of writing to you on the subject.

I have read these volumes, and their notes, with attention, many parts of them aloud to my ingenious friend, Mr Saville, of this place, who has science, classical knowledge, and who is a devoted admirer of the Scriptural poetry.

* Of East-Ham, Essex, who died in 1808.

We examined also, in our progress, the various parts of the Bible which are praised, analysed, or referred to. This pleasing investigation engaged, through several weeks, the chief portion of my too scanty leisure for reading. I determined to complete it before I addressed you upon the pleasures it has given me. They will, I hope, be often renewed, since I have purchased the volumes, and consider them as one of the chief treasures of my book-shelves.

I often wonder how it is possible to accomplish the very transcribing such volumes as these, amidst the engrossing business, and society of a life like yours;—but I congratulate you upon having completed a great work, useful and delightful to unborn ages. I hope the good Bishop saw a large part of it, at least, before the eyes of his understanding grew dim. If so, he must have felt great pleasure in perceiving the strength, the spirit, and grace of his work transfusing, with undiminished excellence, into his native language. I never saw a translation, which more perfectly possessed the dignity, the ease, the perspicuity, and glow of original composition.

The fine print of the Bishop, prefixed, is a treasure, augmenting, by the penetrating and benevolent expression of the countenance, the delight with which we listen to the opinions of so learned, so wise, so great, so good a man, on a

subject universally interesting and important, where there is any taste for literature.

He has thrown a large quantity of new, and very brightening light upon the Hebraic poetry, which certainly abounds in pathetic and sublime passages;—yet I must think our right reverend author considerably prejudiced, when he asserts, that, considered merely as poetry, nothing amongst the ancient and modern classics approaches it, as to pathos and sublimity; and very much indeed do I think him mistaken when he tells us, in the first lecture, that poetry, on any other than *religious* subjects, seems out of character. Is poetry out of character in the Plays of Shakespeare, the Epistles of Pope, and the Odes of Gray?

Poetry is doubtless well adapted to prophetic denunciation, and to promissory blessings, where he that breathes them believes himself inspired; to religious apostrophe, to deprecation, and to triumphant praise;—but surely it is *not* suited to the humble, chastised sensations with which *prayers* should be offered, and which ought to characterize a Christian's supplicatory devotion.

Luxuriance of imagination is essential to poetry; and in these days that is surely out of place when it wantons with sacred subjects. The rational mind feels a sort of horror and disgust, in perusing the extravagant hymns of some of our Christian enthusiasts, even those of the pious Watts;

and along the extended course of the mournful, and angry Night Thoughts, noble and sublime as they are, through at least half their progress; till, by dwelling too long on the subject, important and fruitful as it was, pious ardour degenerated into rant and extravagance. We intuitively feel that ungoverned rapture, and ungoverned indignation violate alike that awe-struck deference, which ought to guard our adoration and our zeal.

Bishop Lowth justly extols the greatness of this promissory passage,

> " The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun,
> And the light of the sun shall be seven-fold."

Mr Henly, in a note upon it, says—" Hence, perhaps, Milton adopted his

> ———" Another morn
> Risen on mid-noon."

If indeed, which appears improbable from the slightness of the resemblance, and from the latter being a simile, which the first is not, Milton had the Scriptural passage in view, grand as it is, he has, in his imitation, much increased that grandeur. In the first instance, the access of splendour seems not wholly beyond conception; and there is, compared with Milton's idea, somewhat of tame preciseness in the additional quantity

of splendour being mathematically ascertained. But Adam's exclamation on the appearance of the angel Michael, presents an idea of ineffable beauty and resplendence, by a simile, of which we have no distinct perception; and which, from that very indistinctness, becomes abundantly more sublime than the description from which Mr. Henly supposes it taken.

Learned and ingenious as Professor Michaelis appears, I feel more inclined to dissent from him than from any other annotator on these volumes. A note of his on the first lecture appears to me written upon a very mistaken idea, viz. that oratory and poetry demand talents so different, that he who is great in one of those arts, must have been naturally incapable of excelling in the other. Now the most essential excellence of each is incontrovertibly the same—an empire over the passions. All the figures of rhetoric are, in nearly equal degree, useful and ornamental to both. Hence it seems impossible, that he, who is great in one line, should not have been equally so in the other, if a science so kindred had happened to have been the favourite pursuit.

Tautology, or even amplification, that throw not any new light upon the subject, are as disgusting in oratory as in poetry. Then, as to being on a level with the comprehension of the

populace, which he tells us is necessary to the excellence of the first, without being necessary to that of the latter, it is certain, the splendid orators of our day, the late Chatham, and his illustrious successor with the brilliant opponents of that successor, Burke, Fox, and Sheridan, are as little intelligible to the mere populace, as the poetry of Beattie, Mason, and Hayley.

That great orators are seldom great poets, is accountable from their different habits, not from their different natures. The poet must devote the chief part of his time to study and sequestration, in which the graces of insinuating address, and extempore fluency of speech, rust in inaction. The orator must live in the busy haunts of men, nor has leisure to cultivate the arts of versification; which, when they are exquisite, are less spontaneous than they are imagined:—and, after all, the beautiful poetic effusions which have fallen from the pen of Mr Fox, and yet more copiously from that of Mr Sheridan, exemplify the total mistake of the Professor's assertion.

Equally erroneous are all the rules he lays down to defend that assertion: for instance, he maintains that brevity is the chief excellence of poetry, and copiousness of oratory—now, both in turn become the leading merits of each, as may easily be proved.

It is by amplification that those nicely discriminated features are given, which enchant the spirit, by bringing the scene described to the eye, or the passion described to the heart, and this more forcibly than it is in the power of any broad and general idea to effect, given with the bold conciseness of the elder poets. The Hebrew bards are often striking and poetic, when they speak of the preparation of armies for battle, and of the dread of superior force in the martial contests: yet Shakespeare's description of the night preceding the battle of Agincourt, produces greater effect by copious discrimination, even than they do by brevity. The neighing of the steeds; the darkened face of either army, just visible to the other through the pale gleam of the night-fires;—the crowing of the village-cocks at distance, announcing the approach of a morning so full of fate;—and, above all, the dreadful notes of preparation from the hammers of the artificers, closing up the rivets of the armour!—Ah, surely no brief condensing into one general image—no single comparison, however bold and exalted, could so deeply impress the mind as these felicities of poetic amplification!

It is by them that the morning hymn in Paradise Lost, is rendered so much more poetically

beautiful than the Psalm from which it is evidently taken.

"O! all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever!"

"These are thy glorious works, parent of good,
Almighty!—thine this universal frame,
Thus wond'rous fair;—thyself how wond'rous then,
Unspeakable;—who sit'st above these Heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works;—yet all declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."

"O! all ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever!"

"Speak, ye who best can tell, ye sons of light,
Angels,—for ye behold him, and with songs
And choral symphonies, day, without night,
Circle his throne rejoicing. Ye in Heaven;
On earth—join all ye creatures to extol
Him first, him last, him midst, and without end."

"O! all ye stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever!"

"Fairest of stars, last in the train of night,
If better thou belong not to the dawn,
Sure pledge of day, that crown'st the smiling morn
With thy bright circlet, praise him in thy sphere
While day arises, that sweet hour of prime."

It is thus that, by filling up what are mere outlines in the Hebraic poetry, Milton, through the whole course of the Paradise Lost, proves that amplification may be, and very frequently is, the leading excellence of poetry, and that the poetry of a much later day can do more than approach the acknowledged excellence of the Hebrew bards.

I was beyond measure astonished at the Professor's note, vol. ii. p. 242, upon the sublime exclamation of David, sung in chorus, by the priests and Levites, when the ark had arrived at the top of Mount Sinai:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

With a literality most miserably groveling, does this annotator endeavour to extract all the noble enthusiasm from this soul-exalting address—first, by changing the word everlasting to ancient; and then by telling us that the real meaning of the passage is, "The gates, which were mean and narrow before, and unworthy of Jehovah, should be heightened and extended." The plain sense of which intepretation is, "send for the carpenter to widen the door-place, or the ark will never get in."

But if, in general, I do not think Professor

Michaelis, by any means a just or feeling decider upon the constituent excellencies of poetry, I am charmed by his historic and geographic elucidations of several parts of our Bible, particularly with those in the first volume, which commence page 140.

A note of your's entirely does away his conclusion upon the imaginary astronomic ignorance of the Hebrew bards, drawn from their poetry being so little stellar. The stars are certainly too monotonous in their appearance to form a fruitful resource of poetic imagery.

Amongst a number of Mr Henly's admirable notes, I am particularly pleased with the sensible comments upon Virgil's eclogue to Pollio. Most rationally do they account for the similarity of its passages to the prophecies of our Saviour, and for their being applied to the expected, though yet unborn son of Augustus, which, unfortunately for the poet and his prophecy, proved a daughter. The Bishop, however, seems to lean to the strange fancy of some enthusiasts, that Virgil was writing he knew not what, about he knew not whom, which proved an unconscious inspiration from the true God, shadowing forth the birth of the Messiah, and the blessings of his reign.

Your poetic translation of the 42d psalm is eminently beautiful:—yet I think you will agree with

me, that, in general, our prayer-book translation of those Hebraic hymns, I mean the *reading* one, unfettered by rhyme and measure, is the best vehicle for the bold, sublime, yet wild ideas, and shadowy, rather than distinct resemblances, of the Jewish lyrists. To have put the whole of Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, or their twin spirit in poetry, Ossian, into measure, and especially if rhyme were added, would have been as injudicious as to drape the Pharneze Hercules, or the Apollo Belvidere. The graceful flow of the vestments could not have recompensed the inevitable diminution of strength and elegance, resulting from an injudicious attempt to increase them.

But your version, mentioned above, has acquired heightened beauty by the change, and I often repeat to myself two of its lines,

> "Say where is now thy great deliverer fled,
> Thy mighty God, deserted wanderer, where?"

The repetition of those harmonious and pathetic lines, towards the close, has a sweet effect.

David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan, makes a fine poem in verse—yet I think it wholly impossible, that it should not, beneath any hand, however masterly, lose much of its grace and spirit, from the restrictions of measure and rhyme.

Over that lamentation I am inclined to echo the Bishop, and say, that it is, as given in our Bible, above all other poetry, pathetic and sublime.

Self-love and gratitude will here intrude their acknowledgements, that my muse never received such distinguishing honour as you have done her in this work, by complimenting the exordium to Cook's Elegy, with a nearer approach to that matchless lamentation, than any thing you have seen in modern composition;—and also by placing the exordium to the Monody on André amongst the selected instances of excellence in the Prosopopeia.

I am delighted with your notes on the 5th lecture, which commence page 106—and which so ably demonstrate the fallacy of that rule by which our periodical critics, with Midas-like decision, condemn beautiful passages in the poets of this day, viz. that metaphoric language is not natural, when the mind is agitated. They persist in this stupidly false assertion, though daily experience might shew them, if they were capable of observation, that the most unlettered ignorance speaks in metaphor when heated by anger, or pierced by affliction. Nothing can be more true than your observation, that "the associating principle is the source of all figurative language, and that the greatest excess of figurative language, the hyber-

bole, requires impassioned situations to preserve it from producing coldness in the style by the very attempt to give it warmth."

But if I were to descant upon all the critical notes to this work which are signed T., and which have pleased and instructed me, my letter, already too long, would be voluminous indeed. The path in which I dissent from you has a very limited extent, though its opposition is *total*.—It is on the subject of Sterne. I throw down my warder, but, if you please, the day of combat shall be a little time hence; till when, repose upon your laurels!

LETTER LXXX.

GEORGE HARDINGE, ESQ.

Lichfield, Nov. 21, 1787.

YOUR epigram from Martial is elegant; yet, I confess, the idea seems to me not expressed with sufficient clearness; if indeed it is meant that not duration, but a certain character in friendship proves it genuine.

In the year 1785, I wrote a poem, addressed to Mr Whalley, then on the Continent. It contains the same thought. I knew not that it had been expressed by Martial. Mr Whalley had passed a long and severe winter in Chambery, induced by a friendship which he had formed at Dijon with an amiable Savoyard nobleman, the Baron de Chatilion. The second of the following stanzas you will find expressing the idea in question:

What marvel, Whalley, that a soul like thine,
Shou'd brave the bitter storms, that ceaseless howl
Where winter shivers on his rocky shrine,
With nitrous breath, and pet'rifying scowl!

What marvel, drawn by that magnetic power
Which soul to soul so instantly endears,
Investing friendship's young and blossoming hour,
With all the ripeness of experienc'd years.

I devoured Lord Camelford's * description of Vaucluse. My friend, Mr Whalley, visited it twice, exploring, with the most eager curiosity, every feature of the scene. His description of it, after the first visit, made earlier in the summer, before the snows were melted, tallies very exact-

* See a Letter to Mr Whalley dated December 20th 1787.

ly with his Lordship's; though it is curious that each concludes his description with an observation totally opposite. Mr Whalley says, that the wild, romantic, and mountainous seclusion of the scene, is peculiarly suited to sooth, by indulgence, the melancholy of hopeless love, and induce it to give poetic colouring to its sorrows. Lord Camelford, you know, observes, that the whole of the scene is majestic and imposing; but not such as he should think likely to feed the love-sick mind, or the soft images of enamoured poetry.

We cannot doubt, from Petrarch's perpetual mention of the Vaucluse laurels, that they did luxuriantly ornament the valley when he passed so much time in its recesses, though no vestige of them now remains. The scene must have appeared more beautiful and soothing when graced by their soft umbrage. Behold Mr Whalley's delineation of this celebrated vale, after his second visit, in the summer 1785:

"I have paid another visit to the enchanting fountain;—and what a change! There had been a great thaw and heavy rain a few days before;—and its azure waters, that, ere-while, slept in their rocky cavern, were now risen above its brim, and were rushing, with lavish violence, over the shelving mound of mossy crags, which time had thrown from the overhanging rocks. With repeated,

foaming, and loud cascades, they augmented the Sorgue, which was now become a considerable river.

" Did I mention, in my first hasty sketch, the lonely graces of the little winding valley, which leads to the bold scenery of rocks immediately about the fountain? The chief umbrage of the vale bends over the Sorgue, and is formed of the willow and the mulberry tree. I remember observing, that the solitary and melancholy appearance of the whole scene seems formed to sooth the sorrows of despairing love.

" On our return from the fountain, the steeple, the curate's house and garden, stand grouped to the eye in the most picturesque manner imaginable: and, in the latter, two ancient and venerable cypresses stand side by side, as if mourning over the ashes of Petrarch and Laura, and as emblems of their ever-verdant memories. They are the only large trees to be discerned, and we find them exquisitely in keeping with our ideas amidst a scene so consecrated.

" On the summit of the left-hand heights of Vaucluse, stand the remains of what is called Petrarch's Castle, though I believe it is ascertained that it never belonged to him; that *his* was an humbler roof, situated in a more rural spot, and more consonant to his situation and his taste.

"At the end of the village, I was glad to find this ruin not so inaccessible as Mr Wraxal thought; though it cost me many a difficult and wearying step to reach and explore it; but I was repaid by noble views of the country, far and near, and especially by those of the valley, the river Sorgue, and the village, which I caught, in the manner that painters love, through the ivied arches of the rocks.

"On the high ground, on the other side, stands, haughtily, in a barren wild, the Chateau de Som mane, where Laura once dwelt, and which yet belongs to some of her direct descendents. It was lately inhabited by the ingenious and learned Abbé de Sade. Some years since, he published a voluminous history of Petrarch and Laura, of which Mrs Dobson's is a mere abridgment. I have just read it, and found it satisfactory and entertaining, though often too prolix; and though his translations prove him no poet, nor always an accurate master of his author's sense, he has put it beyond all doubt, that his ancestress was the Laura of Petrarch." —

So far Mr Whalley. In the poem mentioned in the beginning of this letter, I attempted a poetical landscape of Vaucluse. It may perhaps one day see the light.

The letter * you sent me of Horace Walpole's is brilliant, and, from its subject, inevitably interesting; but do not expect that I can learn to esteem that fastidious and unfeeling being to whose insensibility we owe the extinction of the

* "I have received the drawings of Grignan, and know not how to express my gratitude sufficiently; but, by a silly witticism in the style of some of the quaint novels of the last age, they are so much more beautiful than I expected, that I am not surprised at your having surprised me by exceeding even what I expected from your well-known kindness to me.

"They are charmingly executed, and with great taste. Grignan, too, is in a much nobler situation than I expected; as I concluded that the witchery of Madame Sevigné's ideas and style had spread the fine leaf-gold over Places, with which she gilded all her Friends.

"All that has appeared of them since the publication of her letters, has lowered them. A single letter of Madame de Grignan's, that which describes the Duchess of Bourbon's toilette, is alone worthy of the mother. Paulina's own letters contain not a tittle that is worth reading. One just perceives that she might have written well if she had had any thing to write about, which, however, would not have signified to her grandmother.

"Coulanges was a silly good humoured glutton, who flattered a rich widow for her dinners. His wife was sensible, but dry, peevish, and growing old. Unluckily nothing more is come to light of Madame Sevigné's son, whose short letters in the collection, I am almost profane enough to prefer to his mother's; which makes one astonished that she did not love so natural, unaffected, and congenial a wit, and prefer it to the

greatest poetic luminary, if we may judge from the brightness of its dawn, that ever rose in our, or perhaps in any other, hemisphere.

This fine wit of Strawberry-hill, is of that order of mortals who swarm, always swarmed, and always will swarm, in refined states; whose eyes of admiration are in their backs, and who, consequently, see nothing worthy their attention before, or on either side of them; and who, therefore, weary, s[illegible]ken, and disgust people, whose sensibilities are strong and healthy, by their eternal cant about the great *have beens*, and the little *ares*.

Wit, dearly as I love it, cannot atone to me for such envious, such backneyed nonsense, from age to age transmitted. Shaftesbury canted in this style during that very period which the back-gazers of our time extol, and dignify with the title of

eccentric and sophisticated reveries of her sublime and ill-humoured daughter. Grignan alone maintains its dignity, and shall be consecrated here among other monuments of that bewitching period, and amongst which one is so glad to lose one's self, and drink oblivion of an æra so very unlike. The awkward bigots to despotism in our time, have not Madame Sevigné's address, nor can, like her, paint an Indian idol, with an hundred hands, as graceful as the Apollo Belvidere.

"I shall soon want your protection in Westminster-hall against the Bishops, an odious race, whether clerical or laic. You heard how infamously I have been treated by Colonel and by Ned Bishop. Oh! they could not be worse if they were in orders! Yours,—HORACE WALPOLE."

Augustan. How severe is your friend upon the clergy in the close of his letter! I have known many who reflected upon them, but have always found reasons, of various species, for distrusting either the soundness of their understanding, or the goodness of their hearts.

A sly creature this Welch judge of ours. No man, or woman either, better knows how to frame a sentence which she, to whom it is addressed, may interpret praise or satire, as her conscience shall dictate. Of this Janus-species is the paragraph in your last, which says,—"Your letter of to-day is, more than all its predecessors, above this visible diurnal sphere."

I grant you, *ascendant*, and not *ascension*, ought to have been the word. It was certainly climbing above the visible diurnal sphere with a stiff knee; but I always write in too much haste to pause for best-possible verbalisms; and to my pen the prompt is oftener the poetical than the prose-expression. I may say, with Cowley to the muse,

> "When my new mind had no infusion known
> Thou gav'st so deep a tincture of thy own,
> That, ever since, I vainly try
> To wash away th' inherent dye."

So pray have patience when I come striding

along upon the stilts she gave me, because I cannot stay to find my shoes. As to *qmity*, which you grumble at, 'tis a pretty, tender, femality word, that does not walk so tall as friendship—so pray don't kick it down for a strutter.

Let our great Sully alone—no sneers at his *ice*, I intreat! That frosty constitution has, perhaps, braced the nerves of England's credit and consequence. "What, lost Mark Antony the world?" Answer to yourself the question, and play the tempter no more!

LETTER LXXXI.

COURT DEWES, ESQ. AT PAW, IN BERNE.

Lichfield, Dec. 3, 1787.

I AM charmed by the alacrity with which you have performed, in so short a time, a journey of a thousand miles. 'Tis an admirable sign that the Continental gales will be beneficial to your health, when, through a winter so softened, you shall breathe them serenely and at leisure. How strange would it seem to us folk, who have been always fixed like a plant to one peculiar spot of

English ground, were we to see days splendid as those of our warmest summers, sink into darkness soon after five o'clock.

The little time allowed me for the luxury of reading, has, within the last three months, been devoted to studying the Hebraic bards, allured by Dr Gregory's admirable translation of Bishop Lowth's Lectures. They form two large quarto volumes, closely printed, and enriched with a variety of learned and ingenious notes. An attentive examination of this work, with that of all the chapters, psalms, and single passages referred to, have rendered me more conversant than I ever was before with the sacred poetry, though always an admirer of its wild and daring graces; but I cannot think with the Bishop, that, considered merely as poetry, it immeasurably, or indeed that it all transcends, the ancient and modern classics. A large portion of poetic strength, pathos, and dignity, animate the pages of David, Job, Solomon, and the Prophets; and, without taking reason or religion into the scale, there is a solemn magnificence in the system of Theism, which can never belong to Polytheism; but then the former is excluded from all that beautiful play of imagination, all the gayer graces which throw such soft and varied resplendence over the Pagan Theology, and the bold, but wild, and generally indistinct,

similies and descriptions of prophetic composition, leave us little of that skilful and happy discrimination that brings the object to the eye in imagery, and to which, in sentiment, every feeling of the heart responds.

LETTER LXXXII.

Rev. Dr Gregory.

Lichfield, Dec. 5, 1787.

And now, Sir, our day of combat is come *.—You deny Sterne originality—and say that no classic ear can endure his style. These assertions more than surprise—they astonish me. What!—that imagination, which I have always thought of such exquisite, such original colouring!—that penetration which seems to have an hundred eyes with which to look into the human heart!—that happy, thrice happy, mixture of the humorous and the pathetic, in which he stands alone amongst all other writers out of the dramatic scale; resembling none, and whom not one, amongst his numerous

* See conclusion of a former letter to this gentleman, dated Nov. 13, 1787.—*S.*

imitators, have attempted to copy, without proving, by their total failure, the difficulty of acquiring a manner so singularly, so curiously original. Like ether, its spirit is too subtile and volatile to become the vehicle of any other person's ideas. And then that frolic fancy!—that all-atoning wit!—that style which my ear finds so natural, easy, animated, and eloquent!—how could you thus scorn them?

My dear Sir, *who* are they from whom he has borrowed? Some slight, very slight, resemblance perhaps exists between the best sallies of Swift's humour and Sterne's: but Swift has not any of Sterne's pathos, and Sterne has none of the filthiness of Swift,—though too apt to sport licentiously with comic double-meanings. His fault, in that respect, however justly censurable, has no tendency to injure the minds of his readers by inflaming their passions. Swift and Rabelais, whom he is also accused of copying, never interest the affections, while Sterne guides, turns, and precipitates them into any channel he pleases.

I can believe that he took the hint of character for his sub-acid philosopher from the Martinus Scriblerius of Pope, Swift, and Arbuthnot; but there is an immense superiority in the vividness with which he has coloured his Shandy; in the dramatic spirit he has infused into the character;

in the variety of situations in which he has placed the hypothesis-monger,—all natural, probable, and exquisitely humorous. We see and hear the little domestic group at Shandy-hall; nor can we help an involuntary conviction, not only that they all existed, but that they had been of our acquaintance; and where may be found even the most shadowy prototype in books, of uncle Toby and his Trim, of Mrs Shandy and Dr Slop*?

At last this note of your's in your great work against Sterne—this note,

> "At which my very locks have stood on end,
> Like quills upon the fretful porcupine,"

Confirms anew an observation of mine, long since made;—that I never knew a man or woman of letters, however ingenious, ingenuous, and judicious, as to their general taste, but there was some one fine writer, at least, to which their "Lynx's beam became the mole's dim curtain." Mason, Hayley, and Boothby, are moles to Ossian. Gray was a mole to Rousseau.—Darwin is a mole to Milton, and that you will say is indeed a

* For a more discriminating parallel between the Scriblerius Fragment and Tristram Shandy, see a letter to this gentleman further on in the collection, and dated Oct. 30, 1788.—*S.*

molism. Envy made Johnson a mole to all our best poets, except Dryden and Pope. You are a mole to Sterne;—and I—for why should not my portly self run in amongst you intellectually greater folk?—I am a mole to Spencer, so far at least, that, though I perceive the power of his genius in the mass, and infinitely admire particular passages, I could never read a book of the Fairy-Queen through, without being ennuied past bearing by the Hydra-headed allegories.

But molism of this kind always existed. Plato was a mole to Homer.—You are no mole to *me*, however, for, in truth, you have looked at the little stars of my imagination, through Mr Herschel's last optic-glass.

Proceeding through your Lowth, often have I, in imagination, enjoyed the pleasures that must result to you from the consciousness of having honourably completed so great a work—the reputation of which must increase as time rolls on. May health, and domestic happiness, be added to the sunny glow of that consciousness!

LETTER LXXXIII.

CAPTAIN SEWARD*

Dec. 7, 1787.

Is it possible that Lord Heathfield should not see the impropriety of my presuming to intrude upon the Duke of Richmond's attention with an interference, by request, in military promotions, since I can scarcely be said to have the shadow of a personal acquaintance with his Grace?

My father's present state, the almost utter loss of all his intellectual faculties, is known. Did he possess them, impertinent surely would be an acknowledgement from him, that he supposed the Duke meant any thing more than a polite compliment, by giving the name of obligation to the civility of ordering our servants to make up a bed for him during three nights, and to prepare a bason of gruel for him in the morning, before he went to the field. This was literally all he could be prevailed upon to accept beneath this roof, when, in his years of bloom, he united the occupation of Mars to the form of Adonis. I was then a

* This respectable character is still alive, and resident at Southampton.—1810.

green girl, "something between the woman and the child," nor have I ever since beheld the Duke of Richmond. Though I so perfectly remember *him*, it is more than probable that he remembers not me; and it would be more than impertinent to presume that I could have interest with him.

As to incurring obligations, I should be very glad thus to incur them from the Duke for your advantage;—but observation, and indeed the revolt I have always myself felt from officious recommendation, invariably proved to me that it injures instead of promoting the interests of the recommended. His Grace would certainly be disgusted by my seeming to suppose that any mention I could make of a relation, or friend, could operate in their favour. Disgust has a withering influence upon patronage. What is it I could say, that has a shadow of probability to enhance the Duke's good opinion of a *military* man?—that man already recommended to him by Lord Heathfield, the greatest General existing, whose praise ought to be the passport to martial honours and emolument. An attempt of this sort from me would be just as likely to be of use, as if, had I been in Gibraltar during the siege, and when our artillery was pouring on the enemy, I had thrown a bonfire-squib into the mouth of a forty-pounder to assist the force of the explosion.

And, lest it should be apprehended that my poetic reputation might give some degree of consequence to my request, Mr Hayley, who is the Duke's near neighbour, has told me that his Grace had no fondness for works of imagination. The race of Mæcenas is extinct in this period.

When my dear father was in his better days, he lived on terms of intercourse and intimacy with the Marquis of Stafford. Lord Sandwich and my father, in their mutual youth, had been on the Continent together, with the affection of brothers. On my publishing the Monody on André, he desired me to present one to each of these Lords, expressing an assured belief that the work of an old friend's daughter would not be unacceptable.

I, who ever thought that men of rank have seldom any taste for intellectual exertion, which serves not some purpose of their own interest; and feeling an invincible repugnance to paying attentions, which are likely to be repulsed with rude neglect, strongly, warmly, and even with a few proud tears, expostulated against the intrusion. My father never knew that great world, with which, in his youth, he had much intercourse. Frank, unsuspecting, inattentive to those nice shades of manners, those effects, resulting from trivial circumstances, which develop the human heart, he judged of others by his own ingenuous

disposition. Benevolent, infinitely good-natured, and incapable of treating his inferiors with neglect, he thought every kindness, every civility he received, sincere,—every slight shewn either to himself, or others, accidental.

Thus he would persist in the idea that these Lords would be gratified by such a mark of attention to them; and that I should receive their thanks.—I, who had been so much less in their society, knew them better; that such little great men are as capable of impoliteness as they are incapable of taste for the arts;—but my obedience was insisted upon.

One condition however I made, that, if they should not have the good manners to write, "I thank you, Madam, for your poem," he would never more request me to obtrude my compositions upon titled insolence. They had not the civility to make the least acknowledgement.

My heart (I own it is in some respects a proud one) swelled with indignation;—not at the neglect, for I felt it beneath my attention, and had expected it, but because I had been obliged to give them reason to believe that I desired their notice.

My life against sixpence, the Duke of Richmond would receive a letter from me in the same manner. Ah! a soul like Lord Heathfield's, attentive to intellectual exertions in the closet of

the studious, as in the field of honour, and generous enough to encourage, and throw around it the lustre of his notice, is even more rare than his valour, and military skill. I wish his Lordship to see this letter. It will explain to him the nature of those convictions, and of those feelings, which must be powerful indeed, ere I could hesitate a moment to follow his advice, though but insinuated on any subject. My devoted respects and good wishes are his, as they are your's, not periodically, but constantly.

LETTER LXXXIV.

Miss Weston.

Lichfield, Dec. 12, 1787.

It is pleasant, dear Sophia, to hear what odd things people assert to support their opinions. It seems a strange sort of compliment to say, that pages, covered over with disclosures of the heart, on various subjects, and addressed to absent friends, are not, what they were intended to be, *letters*, but something, Heaven knows what is to be their name, of a totally different kind.

I am at present re-reading, with Giovanni, the by me often read scriptures of your idolatry, our great lyrist, Gray's Epistles; and find, as I was wont, much to admire in them;—yet those addressed to Mr West, before either of them were twenty, while they are full, even to affectation, of splenetic wit, terseness, point, and classical allusion, have no glow, either of the heart or the imagination;—and at a period of life when nothing can recompence their absence. André's letters, published with my Monody on him, have, to me, much more fascinating beauty. Their easy, playful, happy flow of humour, mixed with those fine emanations of lively affection, are infinitely more engaging in youth than that satiric vein which runs through Gray's, and than that comfortless vapourishness, of which they complain. In André's also we find tender enthusiasm, and all those juvenile graces, of which the other are destitute.

There is the same fault in the highly ingenious letters of his riper years—but it sits better on the man than on the boy. They are patterns of wit; but wit is too constantly the master-tint; and therefore is it that the style has not that variety necessary to the perfection of confidential letters. The first models of perfection in the epistolary style are the letters of Clarissa, Miss Howe,

Lovelace, and Belford, in the immortal volumes of Richardson.

With such able assistance as Mr Potter's, there is not much wonder that P. produces poems which contain some good passages. Mr Potter, I am told, lives wholly in retirement. A man of talents, upon whom the world's neglect has borne hard. Adieu!

LETTER LXXXV.

Rev. T. S. Whalley.

Lichfield, Dec. 20, 1787.

Alas! my friend, that ever pain and sickness should impede the exertions of so warm, so clear a spirit!—But the sullen fiends were retreating when you wrote; that was a great comfort; and Mrs Piozzi and Miss Williams speak in a style to confirm my hopes.

The fair Helen Williams is delighted with the visit you paid her at Southampton. It has filled her imagination with your talents, and with the wonders of Mont Blanc. When will your poem

on that theme appear? I asked you this question in my last. Answer me, naughty boy! Can't you speak when a gentlewoman asks you a civil question?

I am charmed that Mrs Piozzi likes me well enough to dream that I have beauty; and I feel happy in having contributed, in the slightest degree, to her wishes.

After poetic fame, I confess I often feel very ardent aspirations; yet are they but a short-lived blaze, and fade away into embers, that scarcely gleam. No fuel more potent can be given them, than your seeming interested that I should publish what I have written. It is needful enough to prevent the very embers from being extinguished by the stupidity or venality, the malice or ignorance of the public critics, and by the oppressive complication of my various employments. Uniting with the constant attention my father's weak and precarious state demands, they do not leave me an hour in a week for transcribing and correcting those materials, whose sometime publication I meditate, and perhaps shall never do more than meditate.

My witty and volatile correspondent, Mr Hardinge, has lately sent me very agreeable letters from his friend and correspondent, Lord Camelford, now on the Continent. There is one de-

scribing Vaucluse, of which I have taken a copy, and, in return, sent Mr H. your so much more full, and more animated description of the same scene, made after your second visit to the consecrated valley, and its fountain; when its waters, in their large cavern, were rushing in torrents over its brim*.

The landscape, by Lord Camelford, is interesting; but the view is single, and many objects are omitted, which so much heighten the interest in your description. The colouring also is comparatively cold;—behold it:—

"From Avignon we went to Vaucluse. The intervening country is every where dry and stony, with mountains at a distance, and the plain dotted with olive-trees, resembling our withies; and that is all the green now in view, except here and there a patch of wheat.

"At length we reach a small and narrow valley, with some little meadows, and a few olive-trees, by the side of a pretty clear stream, and some houses, which constitute the village of Vaucluse. A rock rises immediately behind it, crown-

* This collection contains two descriptions by Mr Whalley of this valley and fountain, a winter and summer scene: The first will be found in a letter to Mr Hayley, dated March 15, 1785: The second, in a Letter, addressed to Mr Hardinge, and dated November 21, 1787.—*S.*

ed with a ruined castle. A small path leads beyond the village amongst the rocks, by the side of a stream, which forms itself from a variety of little springs issuing out of the foot of the mountain, till a dry channel appears, rising steep, with uncouth fragments interspersed in it. Here the valley narrows, and leads into a recess, where nothing but huge masses of stone and rock surround you, with, here and there, a bush of wild fig or olive growing out of the chinks of the craggy cliff.

"Opposite is a perpendicular mountain of stone, about six hundred feet high, like an immense quarry. The ground slopes considerably from our feet to its base, which opens into a large cavern, filled, as far as the eye can discern, with the purest water in the world. In April and May, this spring rises above the cavern, so as to fill the whole bason, which is surrounded with cliffs, except in the front, where it tumbles down the rocky channel, with loud and tumultuous violence, and is broken into a thousand cascades. The whole of the scene is majestic and imposing, but not, to my feelings, such as would fill the mind with images for amorous sonnets. If Dante, if Ossian, had frequented the retreat, I should have understood them better than I do Petrarch, who

would have been more in his place in the quiet vales of Boconoli."

And thus Lord Camelford.—I have, within this past week, looked into Mrs Dobson's Petrarch, which you told me is an abridgement of the Abbé de Sade's Life of that Poet. Mrs Dobson describes the Valley of Vaucluse as luxuriantly sylvan, and of incompasable beauty. There is no saying what devastations time may not have made; but I wonder her original did not supply her with reflections upon its present contrasting appearance, so rude and barren; that she did not inform herself, from recent visitants to a scene so remarkable, that it was shorn of its woods, and that not a leaf of the love-planted laurels remained. Equally strange, that she should make no mention of the Castle de Sommane, where Laura always resided during the summer months, and which remains to this day the property of her direct descendents. The desire of Petrarch to be near his mistress, accounts for the time which he habitually passed in that valley, and for his local devotion.

If Lord Camelford had known to whom that ruined castle once, nay, to whom it yet belongs, he had surely not expressed his wonder at Petrarch's choice of retreat, nor fancied he could

have been more in his place in any other valley, however superior in scenic beauty.

Pray mention this subject when you write next, and account to me, if you can, for Mrs Dobson's omissions, and for the false description she gives of this scene. No romantic exaggeration should, in all policy, have been used in descanting upon a situation so known. With what delight, were it in my power, should I visit Vaucluse, and pay homage at its watery shrine!

LETTER LXXXVI.

Miss Helen Williams.

Lichfield, Dec. 25, 1787.

I am glad you like my friend Colonel Barry. He has genius, literature, and an high sense of military honour. The laurel and the bays are entwined around his brow. It is singular that he should have succeeded Major André as Adjutant-General to our armies in America; and that both these young soldiers should, at different times, have found the charms of Honora Sneyd so tran-

scendant and impressive, as to have prevented any other attachment capable of extinguishing the impassioned recollection of her. Within these three years, Colonel Barry assured me, that she was the only woman he had ever seriously loved; that he never beheld a being in whom the blended charms of mind and person, could approach the lustre of those which glowed in the air, the look, the smile, the glance, and the eloquence of Honora Sneyd. Judge you, who know the idolatry of my spirit on that theme, how Colonel Barry must have engaged my regard, by exhibiting, in himself, a second proof of constancy, so rare in these gross times, to *my* Madam de Grignan,—now mouldering in the tomb, but surviving, in my memory, with all her matchless endowments, graces, and virtues.

Yes, it is very true, on the evening he mentioned to you, when Mrs Piozzi honoured this roof, Colonel Barry's conversation greatly contributed to its Attic spirit. Till that day, I had never conversed with her. There has been no exaggeration, there could be none, in the description given you of Mrs Piozzi's talents for conversation; at least in the powers of classic allusion and brilliant wit. Comic humour, and declamatory eloquence are Mrs Knowles's fort, and in them she

is unrivalled. I speak of our sex, for in wit and classic spirit, who may transcend Mr Hayley?

When Mrs Piozzi and I met the next morning we agreed, that if Colonel Barry was a little less sentious, he would be divine.

I have been attacked with some virulence, and abundance of absurd sophistry, in the Gentleman's Magazine for July 1787, about my letters on Johnson, signed Benvolio. I replied in the next number, page 684. The answer to that reply, in the November number, is too feebly and evidently sophistical, to be worth any farther notice.

Johnson's uncandid and intolerant bluster against the Dissenters has made every proud High Priest his idolater and champion. Whoever, therefore, speaks impartially of him,

> ——————"Calls up a pitchy cloud
> Of locusts, warping on the funeral * winds,
> That o'er Great Johnson's glaring errors hang
> Like night, and darken all the rays of truth."

You will easily procure from Mr Whalley an introduction to Mrs Piozzi. It will delight you to hear with what energy she speaks of her Egyp-

* Parody on a famous simile in the Paradise Lost.—S.

tian bondage to the arbitrary despot. Scarcely was it less severe for having been voluntary. What a recompense did the ingrate make her after her marriage, for the devotion of her fortune, her health, her peace, to prevent every want, every wish of his! To a benevolent and cheerful temper like hers, most oppressive must have been his habitual malignancy, when resident under her roof. Perhaps she knows not the opprobrious terms in which he abused her for a connection, which, however it might lessen her consequence with the world, was clear from every stain of criminality towards God and towards man. He spoke of her in company here, as a being without veracity, or worth of any kind; even she, Mrs Thrale! whom he tells, in his letters to her, after many year's intimacy, and daily intercourse, "that to hear her was to hear wisdom; to see her was to see virtue!"

No, indeed, I quarrel not with Burns for his high Scotch; so far from it, that all my favourite parts of his compositions are in the broad Caledonian dialect. It is when he writes in English that his imagination flags and dwindles into ill-judged plagarism. Pope stole immensely, but his thefts were from obscure English poets of earlier times, whose embryo-ideas he finished up

into perfect shape, and breathed over them that warm glow of colouring, that rich harmony and luminous perspicuity, that none knew better how to impart. It is unfortunate to see in Burns such a predation as the following, made upon the very fine and popular song in Shakespeare's As You like It.

> " Blow, blow, ye winds, with heavier gust,
> And freeze thou bitter biting frost!
> Descend, ye chilly smothering snows!
> Not all your rage, uniting, shews
> Such hard unkindness unrelenting,
> Vengeful malice unrepenting,
> That Heaven-illumin'd man on brother man bestows."

Here is assuredly the most bare-faced theft, and the most sickening inferiority to the plundered lines!

To be sure, I do think his Epistle to Davy, and his Ode to Despondency, the most dissonant jingles that ever tortured the ear; and I marvel much, that he could prostitute his great genius to long uninteresting descriptions of vulgar superstition, in his poem, the Hallowe'en. Not one of the frolic or terrible graces preside over that odd composition.

I feel very much, as you do, about the Yearsley and the Burns. They are both miracles,

His imagination is more luxuriant; and if it has more weeds, it has also more flowers, and some of them are most beautifully and originally tinted. Perhaps she has more depth and strength of thought; but I much oftener, and shall continue much oftener to look into his works than to her's, for they have sweeter poetic witchery. His Vision; the descriptive part of The Winter's Night, for the sentimental part is trite; the dear Brigs of Ayr; the Cottager's Saturday Night; the Mouse; and the Mountain Daisy, enchant me.

It would here be injustice to Lactilla not to observe, that her poem On the Sudden Death of an Amiable Lady is original and finely imagined. Her Address to Friendship is spirited and new, upon a very hackneyed theme, and it strongly paints the jealous and gloomy energy of her mind:

> "My soul's ambitions, and its utmost stretch
> Wou'd be to own a friend; but that's denied.
> Now at the bold avowal gaze, ye eyes,
> That kindly melted at my woe-fraught tale!
> Start back Benevolence, and shun the charge,
> Ungrateful as it seems! My abject fate
> Excites the willing hand of Charity,
> The momentary sigh, the pitying tear,
> To misery so kind. Yet not to you,
> Bounty, or Charity, or Mercy mild,
> The pensive thought applies fair Friendship's name;
> That name which never did, or can exist
> But in *equality*.

When I first read that passage, surely very finely written; while all was yet apparent amity between Lactilla and her patroness; Miss More, I exclaimed to the person to whom I was reading it, Ah Yearsley! thou hast a proud and jealous spirit, of the Johnsonian cast. It will be difficult to oblige thee, without cancelling the obligation by the manner of conferring it.

Ere I quit the subject of new-risen genius in our art, let me speak to you of the most amiable poem I have read this many a day. I should like much to converse with the youthful author. It is the junior Mr Hoole's poem, The Curate, that I mean. His description of the ceremony of ordination is charming. The subject is new, in verse, and well becomes the chaste poetic colouring he has thrown upon it. My heart went with his Edward, on his journey home. I saw the top of Snowdon in imagination, with a glow of sympathetic pleasure from the soft domestic source. Soon was this pleasure extinguished in commiserating tears.

Nothing can be more sweet and pathetic than the egotism in the opening of this poem.

But the lovely landscape of his parsonage in the country; how one longs to go and dine with

him!" From want of time, I must repress the inclination I feel to point out the numerous passages in this poem which have delighted me, while with every part I was at least pleased and satisfied. This work is the mild green of poetic writing on which the eye is gratified to dwell, without being dazzled.

With the father of this young bard, the ingenious translator of Ariosto, I had once the pleasure of passing an evening at your house.

The genius of such a youth must give to such a father no common degree of delight,

"When to the sun exulting, he unfolds
His plumes, that with paternal colours glow."

The happiness which results to me from reflecting upon these white specks in the destiny of others, is amongst the dearest of my pleasures. It makes the blessings of my acquaintance my own. Time, as yet, has nothing weakened its force.

Does Mr Hardinge write to you incessantly? His wit is brilliant, his genius considerable; but he is the most decisive, and the oftenest mistaken critic I know, his fine abilities considered. He praises your epistolary talent, and says he loves to encourage you in it. I took the liberty of ob-

serving, in my reply, that if he exacted of you the very frequent intercourse in which he strives to engage me, he would do you injury; intreated him to reflect, that an author's time was his or her source of profit and of fame; that where talents exist, capable of engaging the attention of the public, it was deplorable extravagance to turn them almost all into the covert channel of private letters.

I protest to you his everlasting anathemas upon words, phrases, and usages of style, which are justified by the habitual practice of our finest writers, hectic me past bearing. I have great honour for his talents, his liberality, the energy of his exertions to serve the ingenious and the unfortunate; but I shall never be able long to continue our correspondence, since he will have it to be incessant. I have neither his leisure nor his facility. By the way, whence comes it, that a man so eminent, and so high in the law, a senator, an orator, a counsellor, and a judge, should have so much leisure? As it was said of poor Chatterton, I fancy he never sleeps.

Do you know Mr Christie, from Edinburgh? A young physician, and a rising light in the philosophic and classic spheres, or I am much mistaken.

Adieu!—You will be glad to hear that no storms of pain or present danger agitate the venerable cradle I am rocking.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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